MARK HEALY

THE ANCIENT ASSYRIANS

EMPIRE AND ARMY, 883–612 BC

OSPREY

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For Martha and Ben

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MARK HEALY

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PREFACE

Much has been discovered and written about the Neo-Assyrian Empire since I wrote my first small book on the subject in 1991. This was also for Osprey Publishing and is still available even though it is now over 30 years old. So, I was very pleased when Osprey responded in a very positive fashion to my request to write a bigger book for them on the same subject. It has been my intention to attempt to present to the general reader a more detailed account of the history of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and its army in order to take account of much of the research that has been carried out since 1991.

Indeed, the material on this subject is now vast but it is confined mainly to academe. Though I am not an Assyriologist I have written extensively on military matters and have an academic background in Theology, History and Politics and have taught in these areas for over 30 years. In that time I have maintained my interest in the Assyrians and have increasingly felt that a new work should be written to allow the interested lay public to gain access to at least the salient aspects of this scholarship. I cannot claim nor will do so that this new work is exhaustive – it is far from it – but I hope anyone reading it will at least feel that they have come to understand a little more than they did about the importance of this First Millennium Ancient Near Eastern Empire that at its height in 670 BC encompassed the whole of that region under its aegis.

And because for many people their first acquaintance with the Assyrians comes from the pages of the Jewish Tanakh/ Christian Old Testament, I have written what I have in the first part of this book to reflect the particular impact of Assyria on the Hebrew kingdoms of Israel and Judah. As one who believes the Bible is not the literal word of God and who has been guided in studies of that book by the impact of modern biblical scholarship, History and especially the insights of Assyriology, readers may well find themselves having to accommodate views different to their own. Well, that is my

prerogative as the author, although certain conclusions I come to here – while not revelatory as far as biblical scholarship and Ancient History are concerned – are mine although I am firmly of the view that they can be soundly supported by evidence.

Much has been discovered about the Assyrian Army with a lot of it being quite specialized. Anyone wishing to extend their knowledge on this specific aspect should consult the ongoing multi-volume work by the Hungarian scholar Tamas Dezso. His titles are to be found in the bibliography. They are worthy of detailed study. The bibliography lists many other works as further reading. Nonetheless, I hope that by the time you have finished reading this work you will feel you have learnt something more about the Assyrians.

I wish to express my thanks to the following persons and bodies for their help in the provision of documents, information and photographs. Firstly, the British Museum, who have supplied the bulk of the images herein. Then there is the team who excavated the Assyrian city of Ziyaret Tepe – the ancient Tushan. I would like to thank them and especially John MacGinnis for the provision of images of artefacts from the same. Also Professor Yossi Garfinkel for the insights of the excavation of the siege ramp at Lachish together with the diagram and pictures of it. In addition the British School of Archaeology in Iraq for the artist's impression and ground plan of the *ekal masharti* in Nimrud. Also Dr T. Bolan for the use of the aerial image of Lachish, and Oxbow Books for permission to use part of the article by N. Postgate of the Assyrian Army in Zamua. Last but certainly not least, thanks go to Ashish Sinha as the leader of the team that has proffered a new explanation for the rapid demise of the Assyrian Empire and who kindly allowed me to employ their insights.

Mark Healy, MA, 2022

Ashurbanipal, the great king, the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria, king of the four regions of the world, king of kings, unrivalled prince, who, at the command of the gods, his allies, holds sway from the Upper to the Lower Sea and has brought into submission all rulers; son of Esarhaddon, the great king, the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria, viceroy of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad… grandson of Sennacherib, the great king, king of the universe, king of Assyria, am I.

Ashurbanipal 668–?627 BC

PART ONE

THE EMPIRE

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the year 640 BC, the Assyrian Empire had expanded to encompass the whole of the Ancient Near East. In Assyrian parlance this embraced 'the fours corners of the world' – that is, all the lands from the Upper Sea in the north-east of the Mediterranean to the Lower Sea (the Persian Gulf) in the south-east and from Media in the north-east to Lower Egypt in the south-west. In doing so, albeit for only a short length of time, it had created the greatest empire the world had yet seen.

This was a remarkable achievement for what was essentially a small state, Ancient Assyria occupying the territory we nowadays call Northern Iraq. The process of territorial expansion that was to lead to this end began in the 9th century BC. Although the rise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire over the next three centuries was not planned, its designation by historians as the 'new' empire tells us that this was not the first occasion on which this state had created an empire for itself.

Very briefly, while we can trace the origins of Assyria back to the late 3rd millenium BC its first moves towards empire building came in the wake of Assyria throwing off the contol of the kingdom of Mitanni, which had reduced it to vassaldom by *c.*1472 BC. By the end of the 15th century BC Assyria had reasserted its independence. A measure of the ambition of Ashur-uballit, the

OPPOSITE

Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BC) is credited by some historians with being the true founder of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. He spent many of the years of his reign campaigning to regain the territories lost to the Aramaean influx. His statue, which is in the British Museum, reflects an austere and severe person whose policy of the brutal capture and suppression of the kingdoms of his enemies has made his name a byword for Assyrian cruelty. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

first powerful king of this new period, could be seen in the manner in which he wrote to the pharaoh of Egypt, in effect demanding that Assyria and he be recognized as a major player on the international stage. Thereafter came the first period of Assyrian expansion, which lasted through to the middle of the 12th century BC when the kingdom went into decline.

What is now known as the Middle Assyrian Empire was associated with the dynamic king Tiglath-pileser I, who reigned from 1115 to 1077 BC. It was he who resurrected Assyria's imperial fortunes, but the closing years of his reign also saw him having to deal with the intrusion of nomadic peoples and the onset of deleterious conditions within Assyria brought on by the periodic climate change that afflicted the kingdom. This period saw the beginnings of the disintegration of the regional-power system that had obtained for the previous few hundred years throughout Anatolia, Syria, Canaan and Mesopotamia. This Late Bronze Age collapse and subsequent 'Dark Age' – so called for the relative paucity of evidence dating from the period – resulted in the disappearance of some major territorial players and the temporary eclipse of others. The map of the Ancient Near East was redrawn as these major powers were replaced by myriad new, smaller city-states, each scrambling to assert their identity and power.

The most significant to fall was the Hittite state in Anatolia, which had been one of the dominant powers in the region for centuries. The agents of the demise of the 'empire of Hatti' may have been Thraco-Phrygians, who had been displaced eastwards into Anatolia by the arrival of Illyrian tribes in mainland Greece and the Balkans. Here they encountered the Hittite kingdom and overthrew it. The last cuneiform document from the very extensive Hittite archive discovered in its former capital of Hattusas (modern Boğazköy) dates to 1195 BC, with the city being destroyed shortly thereafter. A number of new, smaller states emerged in northern Syria to lay claim to both Hittite identity and the mantle of that state's power. These were the Neo-Hittite kingdoms, and the Assyrians called this area of what is now northern Syria and southern Turkey the 'land of the Hatti'.

The influential city state of Ugarit also vanished shortly thereafter, along with others in the Levant. Nor was the Egyptian position in Syria and Canaan immune, as Egypt was forced to withdraw behind its traditional borders in the face of those same forces moving south. In many of these cases the agent of this change was the movement of populations collectively known as 'the Sea Peoples', as they were designated by the Egyptians. It is thought that though they were related to the Thraco-Phrygians they were nonetheless distinctive. The term 'the Sea Peoples' constituted an umbrella designation that embraced groups of aggressive seafarers who invaded eastern Anatolia, Syria, Palestine and Cyprus. Egypt survived only when

Rameses III succeeded in defeating them on land and at sea on the very borders of Egypt, but in the aftermath, Egypt's control of Canaan and its Syro-Levantine holdings beyond came to an end.

Farther to the east and some 50 years later, the kingdom of Assyria experienced almost a century and a half of weakness that resulted in the loss of territories acquired over the previous 300 years and which had constituted the Middle Assyrian Empire. To its south, the kingdom of Babylon also found itself contending with many problems that led to the diminishment of its power and its regional influence. Although the causes of the situations in Assyria and Babylon were different from those of kingdoms farther to the west, there was an underlying factor in both.

There is a growing body of evidence that climate change could have been a significant reason behind this regional decline. Studies in historical climatology have pointed to a general rise in temperatures and decline in rainfall over long periods, with all that presaged for ancient agricultural economies. This ongoing phenomenom helps account for the slow disintegration of the Middle Assyrian Empire in the years 1200–1000 BC. Further evidence suggests that this same phenomenum, albeit on a much greater scale, provides a credible explanation for the rapidity of the Neo-Assyrian Empire's collapse in the late 7th century BC.

Whilst the Sea Peoples never moved eastwards, the rulers of Assyria nonetheless had to contend with a major upsurge in a population movement with a source much closer to home. For Assyria and Babylon, the agents of this change were a Semitic people called the Aramaeans. Although accounting for their origins has proved problematic, there is now a consensus that their homeland lay in the deserts of Syria and Upper Mesopotamia, where their tribal progenitors went by the name of the Sutians in the former and the Ahlamu in the latter. It was here that they had existed as a confederation of semi-nomadic herder tribes to be found around the Jebel Bishri and Palymra. Whereas Aramaeans in the west were able to interact with the native Canaanites by virtue of speaking a similar language, Aramaean bore no linguistic similarity with the Akkadian spoken in Assyria and Babylonia.

The earliest Assyrian sources dating to the 11th century BC designate them as the 'Ahlamu of the land Armaya', with the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I referring to them as the 'Ahlamu-Aramaeans' in an inscription. Their eruption out of their desert homeland to the west, north and east of the Syrian desert came about in response to extreme and prolonged famines caused by the aforementioned climate change, and provoked a major redrawing of the map of the Ancient Near East in the Levant and Syria. They were responsible for the emergence of a host of

minor dynasties appearing in Syria and northern Mesopotamia. These came to be known to the Assyrians by the use of the appellation 'Bit', meaning 'House of', followed by that of the eponymous tribal ancestor. There were a multitude of these minor Aramaean kingdoms, whose fate in due course was to succumb to the expansion of Assyria, especially after 745 BC.

This upsurge in nomadic unrest was first witnessed on a wide scale from the 1140s BC and, although these semi-nomads had always proved difficult to control and were a perennial nuisance to the settled peoples of the Fertile Crescent – that arc of cultivable land skirting the Syrian desert, extending from the southern Levant in the west northwards through Syria and thence southwards in the east into what is now modern Iraq – what was now occurring was on an unprecedented scale and reflective of the dire conditions caused by climate change. Whether the livelihood of the Aramaeans was derived from the raising of cattle or from trade, they had traditionally needed to acquire at least some food supplies from the more settled areas on the desert peripheries through the launching of predatory raids, and these were especially frequent and large scale in times of famine. However, in the late 11th/10th centuries they coincided with a decline in Assyrian power brought on by this same climate change, which had profoundly impacted on its own agricultural base and thus on the ability of the kingdom to adequately respond to the challenge posed by these desert interlopers.

OPPOSITE

This is a small cuneiform document excavated by the archaeological team from the site of the fortress city of Tushan (Ziyaret Tepe). It records 'that the military infrastructure of Tushan has collapsed' and has been dated to 612 BC – the date historians now accept for the collapse of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.
(The Ziyaret Tepe Archaeological Project)

From about 1110 BC there was almost perennial unrest due to serious incursions by the Aramaeans on Assyrian territory beyond the river Euphrates. They invaded the steppe lands to the east of the Euphrates and occupied much of the territory in what is still called today 'al Jazirah' (an Arabic term meaning 'the island'), advancing across the 250 miles that separated the Euphrates from the Tigris. Initially though, Assyria was still able to contest the Aramaean advance. The Assyrian monarch Tiglath-pileser I recorded in his Annals: 'Twenty-eight times I fought the Ahlamu-Aramaeans… [once] I even crossed the Euphrates twice in a year. I defeated them from Tadmar, which lies in the country Amurru, Anat, which lies in the country Suhu, as far as Rapihu, which lies in Kar-Duniash [Babylonia]. I brought their possessions as spoils to my town Ashur'.

That Tiglath-pileser had to contend with these Aramaean tribes so many times illustrates the degree to which he was fighting a losing battle, despite the triumphalist tone of his inscription. In 1082 BC his Annals record the dire consequences of climatic change on Assyria itself: 'a famine so severe occurred that people ate one another's flesh; Aramaean "houses" plundered and took many fortified cities of Assyria [in the Jazirah]. Citizens of Assyria fled to the mountains of Habriuri to save their lives. The Aramaeans took their money and their property.' Two years later, in 1080 BC he stated: 'all of the crops of Assyria were ruined… Aramaean houses [tribes] penetrated the area around Nineveh and Kilizi.'

The lower levels of the Tur Abdin highland to the north and the valley of the river Habur essentially passed into Aramaean control. Such was the scale of the incursion and settlement over the longer period that the whole region became known as Aram Naharaim, meaning the 'Aram of the Rivers'.

Although there was opposition to these invaders, Assyria itself plunged into a period of weakness lasting approximately 160 years, although there is little in the way of written sources to detail what occurred. All through to the first half of the 10th century BC, the country experienced hunger, famine and plagues in the face of continuing Aramaean pressure. Though the situation appeared dire, the core of the kingdom was nonetheless preserved with the line

of the river Tigris being held. Not the least reason for the Assyrians being able to weather Aramaean assaults was that the latter were totally unable to act together to bring collective pressure to bear on the Assyrians. Their tribal organization precluded their ability to transcend their sense of native identity and combine their resources. This enabled the weakened Assyrian Army to respond to and defeat each assault as and when it came.

Babylon too suffered at the hands of the Aramaeans and also from another ethnic group, the Chaldaeans. Although there is little in the way of documentary evidence accounting for the encroachment of Aramaean tribes into Babylonia, in what few records there are, they are depicted as aggressive and intrusive. Their presence in Babylonia predated that of the Chaldaeans by several centuries, with their precursors being the Ahlamu who are mentioned in Middle Babylonian archives. However, the first mention of Aramaeans as distinct from the Ahlamu dates from the early 11th century BC when they had begun invading western Babylonia. The Aramaeans were less sedentary than the Chaldaeans, living more apart from the Babylonian population and resisting integration with its people or involvement with their political system. They retained their distinctive tribal identities and structures and occupied few cities and far fewer villages. By the time of Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BC), who first began the Assyrian policy of large-scale intrusion into Babylonian affairs, there is the suggestion that the Aramaeans had spread all over Babylonia. Indeed, he names no fewer than 36 of the total of 40 Aramaean tribes brought under Assyrian domination in his campaigns there.

The Chaldaeans established themselves in the south of Babylonia, in the part of Sumer known as 'the Sealand' or 'the Great Swamp', which extended down to what is now the Persian Gulf. The actual size of this 'Great Swamp' in this period is uncertain, but it does roughly correlate to the contemporary Hor al-Hammar marshes. The origins of the Chaldaeans are uncertain, but it is thought they were related to the Aramaeans and probably came from the deserts of Arabia. As with the Aramaeans, they were tribal in organization, with the term 'Bitu' followed by the name of the tribe being used to distinguish one tribe from another. There were five main groupings, the three largest being the Bit-Amukkani, Bit-Dakkuri and Bit-Yakin – all inveterate foes of the Assyrians, especially the latter. The term Chaldaean derives from the Akkadian word *Kaldu*, which was used both as a name for the people and for the area of southern Babylonia they made their own. Whereas the Aramaeans did not seek to assimilate with the Babylonians, the Chaldaeans did and within a few generations they had adopted Babylonian names that allowed them to integrate and play an influential role in the affairs of the city.

THE CORE ASSYRIAN HOMELAND

To the Assyrians, the 'Land of Ashur', the *mat Ashur* – a term first employed in the Middle Assyrian kingdom – embraced not just the Assyrian triangle but also the lands between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers that had been conquered in the 13th century BC. The loss of the latter to the Aramaeans reduced Assyria in the Dark Age to the core of the kingdom, a territory defined by a triangle of the cities of Ashur, Nineveh and Arbail.

To its north, the Assyrian homeland was bordered by the massif of the Taurus/Armenian Mountains. Behind this, there would emerge in due course what would become Assyria's primary competitor in the region – the kingdom of Urartu – which is today in modern Armenia. To the east, running from the north and inclining to the south-east and far beyond the southernmost border of the kingdom, were the Zagros Mountains (simply called 'the mountains' in Assyrian times), whose spine reached down into the southern part of what is today Iran and which at this time was known as Elam. The Assyrians shared in common with all other Mesopotamian plain dwellers the fear of the numerous uncivilized mountain tribes who would periodically descend to ravage the richer lands below. Their existence generated a very definite collective fear and insecurity. This was especially true for Assyria given the proximity of its northern border to the foothills of the Armenian massif and to the east those of the lower slopes of the Zagros. This accounts for the frequent campaigning of Assyrian kings into these regions to ravage the tribes that lived there. The western boundary of Assyria was demarcated by the Tigris River.

The first capital of the kingdom was Ashur, whose ruins are known today as Qala'at Sherqat, where the Assyrian dynasty began. Named for Ashur, the supreme god of Assyria, the city was situated on a rocky outcrop on the western side of the Tigris. Although it would cease to be the political capital of Assyria in the reign of Ashurnasirpal II, it was to remain as its premier religious site and the city in which the Assyrian kings were crowned and subsequently buried until its fall in 614 BC.

Nineveh lay about 100km to the north of Ashur and was built in proximity to a ford that became, for that reason, a major crossing point on the river Tigris – a factor that was to play a significant role in the city's destiny. The site had an ancient provenance with archaeological evidence attesting to human settlement as far back as 6000 BC. By the beginning of the second millennium a major trade route that came from Anatolia and traversed the southern foothills of the Taurus Mountains crossed the Tigris at this point. Nineveh lay on the eastern riverbank and is today partially embraced by the modern city of Mosul. A further trade route, running from Syria in the west through to the crossing points of the Zagros Mountains and Iran farther east, made the site of

ABOVE

The supreme deity of the Assyrian pantheon was the god Ashur after whom the kingdom was named. The only temple to Ashur was located in the first capital of the kingdom, also named Ashur. It was in Ashur that the kings of Assyria were crowned and buried. At the coronation of a new king it was declared that 'Ashur is king', with the new monarch understood to be his representative. Such was the efficacy of the image of the god as a winged disc either with or without a personification of Ashur that it survived into Persian times, where it was adopted and modified to become the symbol of Ahura Mazda, the god of Zoroastrianism. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Nineveh ever more important during the later Neo-Assyrian period when Sennacherib (704–681 BC) chose the city as Assyria's new capital.

Some 80km to the east of Nineveh is Arbail, which is in turn *c.*105km from Ashur. Of the three cities of Ancient Assyria it is the only one that still remains. It is now known as Erbil and functions as the capital of modern Iraqi Kurdistan. The city is found on the western fringes of the Zagros Mountains and controlled several routes that went up into the mountains and on into Iran – and are still used today. Through Arbail also ran the main trade route from central Assyria down into Babylonia, which paralleled the lower slopes of the Zagros Mountains and the Diyala River.

All three cities were religious centres with temples to gods, the paramount of which was Ashur, it being the home of the national god and the site of the only temple dedicated to the deity. Both Nineveh and Arbail were identified with the goddess Ishtar who was venerated and worshipped as a protector of Assyria. This is reflected in a praise poem dating from the reign of Ashurbanipal (668–*c.*630 BC):

'Exalt and glorify the Lady of Nineveh, magnify and praise the Lady of Arbela [Arbail], who have no equal among the great gods'!

With an area of 75,000 square miles (194,249 square km), what constituted Ancient Assyria is quite large, being on a par with the contemporary African state of Uganda, bigger than modern Syria and slightly smaller in total area than Belarus.

THE ASSYRIAN CALENDAR

According to Sargon II, it was the month of Dumuzi that the gods had ordained to be the month for the beginning of the campaign season. The prescription was to be found on a cuneiform tablet: 'the mighty one Ninurta, the firstborn son of Enlil, mightiest of the gods, which the Lord of Wisdom, Ninshiku, had written down in a tablet of former times for the mustering of the army, for making the camp complete'.

Sargon did not always follow that prescription though, for by the 7th century campaigns and military operations sometimes began earlier than Dumuzi. They also ended much later in the year, if at all, in some cases.

Notwithstanding this divine injunction, in reality, certainly in the 10th and 9th centuries, this was largely dictated by the agricultural calendar. With the army composed almost exclusively of native Assyrians, the king had to wait upon the conclusion of the harvest and the storage of the grain.

I	Nisannu	March–April March Equinox beginning of Assyrian New year.	VII	Tashritu	September–October
II	Ayyaru	April–May	VIII	Arahsamnu	October–November
III	Simanu	May–June	IX	Kislimu	November–December
IV	Dumuzi	June–July	X	Tebetu, Kinunu	December–January
V	Abu	July–August	XI	Sabatu	January–February
VI	Ululu	August–September	XII	Addaru	February–March

It could be as early as the end of April and as late as the end of June before the agricultural workers, who formed the bulk of the infantry, could be freed up from their work on the land.

Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III did not subscribe to Sargon's later prescription, as we see them beginning their campaigns earlier in the year in Ayyaru, Simanu and Dumuzi, with Ashurnasirpal II showing a preference for Simanu and Dumuzi. Sargon's son Sennacherib launched his third campaign against the southern Levant and Judah in the month of Ayyaru – end April/beginning May – and expected it to be over by the end of the campaigning season. A further example is Ashurbanipal's campaign against Elam in 647 BC, which began in Simanu.

Military operations were also on occasion launched quite late in the year as contingencies demanded. Whilst it was desirable for the campaign season to end by October or November this could not always be assured. In the imperial period both local military operations and major campaigns could begin and last beyond this traditional season, and they frequently did so. By that date the army had a far larger population to draw upon and the operations of the army were not constrained so totally by the agricultural calendar in Assyria.

The land of Assyria offered a marked contrast with Babylonia in the south, this being true of both ancient and modern Iraq. Below Ashur and the Lesser Zab River, and to the south of the low hills of the Jebel Hamrin, the transition to a much drier environment is quite apparent. Indeed H.W.F. Saggs, the eminent Assyriologist, likens it to travelling 'into a manifestly different country'. Whereas in Assyria, agriculture was rain-fed, to the south in Babylonia 'the land is flat to the horizon, and for the most of the year its sun-parched earth is arid and dead'. The Assyrian heartland was highly fertile, a consequence of rains beginning in November and which could last through to April. The main crops were barley and wheat. Other crops grown in quantity included onions, flax and emmer. Assyria also had extensive areas of grassland and was able to raise large numbers of sheep, the plain around Nineveh being especially fertile. Such grassland was also employed in the later empire for the grazing of horses for the military.

The king was always concerned about the harvest, as the storage and consumption of barley, wheat flour and hay for the military was extensive. Throughout the Middle and Neo-Assyrian Empires numerous monarchs spoke of the improvements they wrought within the country to improve its agricultural output and with the onset of the empire after 745 BC this became

a recurring motif in their Annals. As an early example from the late Middle Empire period, Tiglath-pileser I proudly declared: 'I had ploughs put into operation throughout the whole land of Assyria, whereby I heaped up more piles of grain than my ancestors. I established herds of horses, cattle and donkeys from the booty which by the help of my Lord Ashur had taken from the lands over which I had won dominion.'

There was an integral relationship between the capacity of the Assyrian Army to wage almost annual campaigns and the harvest, especially at the outset of a campaign. However, once into enemy territory, the presumption was that the Assyrian Army would fall upon the resources of the lands they moved through. Following the beginning of an improvement in the climate in the latter part of the 10th century BC with the return of the rains and the regularized yield of the barley crop among others, Assyria could once again employ its army in aggressive campaigning, albeit in a limited fashion at first.

This period also saw a revival in Assyrian royal inscriptions detailing these campaigns, as the period of retreat and territorial loss had in no way diminished the Assyrian imperative to conquer. Apart from the rain-fed fertility of the land and its consequent agricultural output, Assyria had very few other natural resources to sustain the kingdom. The need to acquire the metals, stone and wood essential for the Assyrian economy was the primary drive behind Assyrian expansionism, though the urge to deny these resources to competitor states was also important. Although Assyrian expansionism between the 9th and 7th centuries BC was grounded in an imperialist religious-political ideology in which the kings of the land were tasked to expand it at the behest of the god Ashur, no matter how it was 'dressed up', at base the drive was fundamentally economic and was to remain so until the end of the empire.

These military campaigns were assisted by the fact that there were now no other major powers on the international scene who could successfully contend with the Assyrian state and delimit its aspirations once its process of expansion began. As one eminent Assyriologist has expressed it, 'even in her weakened condition Assyria now towered like a giant over a multitude of dwarfs'.

CHAPTER TWO

ASSYRIA, 934–745 BC

THE RECOVERY OF LOST LANDS

The advent of Ashur-dan II (934–912 BC) saw a revival in Assyrian power, and this coincided with an improvement in climatic conditions. The return after many years of regular harvests and the stabilization and expansion of population that followed in its train permitted the kings of Assyria to contemplate a return to the expansive policy of their ancestors. However, the objective of the first three kings of this period, Ashur-dan II, Adad-nirari II and Tukulti-ninurta II (934–884 BC), was to recover the areas that had been dominated by Assyria in the Middle Assyrian period and since lost to the Aramaeans, primarily the Habur Valley and Middle Euphrates region. These monarchs made no attempt to reintegrate these lost lands into Assyria; rather they conducted annual campaigns that can best be described as *razzias* where the explicit purpose was to reassert Assyrian hegemony over them and control and milk the assailed states of their wealth and resources through the acquisition of booty and the imposition thereafter of annual tribute (*madattu*). None of the kings involved in the military operations of this period sought to extend Assyrian control permanently beyond the river Euphrates.

OPPOSITE

A statue of Shalmaneser III (858–824 BC), who spent many years of his reign campaigning to all points of the compass. Shalmaneser created only one province which was based upon the city of Til-Barsip. In all of his many other campaigns the city-states he subdued were turned into vassal states, their rulers sworn by oath to pay a yearly tribute – with the failure to do so leading to a ferocious visitation of the Assyrian Army as punishment. (© Thaliastock / Mary Evans)

The first forays made by Ashur-dan were limited in scope, being directed at the north-east and north-west of Assyria. These involved Assyrian territories taken by the Aramaeans such as Habruiri, and Ashur-dan was particularly proud of his recovery of the former Middle Assyrian province of Katmuhu, which had asserted its independence in the time of troubles. The description of how he dealt with the ruler of that kingdom and determined the city's post-conquest status is instructive, as it sets a precedent for those kings who followed him. Despite the fact that Katmuhu had formerly been part of Assyria, Ashur-dan chose not to bring it back into the fold. Instead, he sacked the city and destroyed the royal palace. A new king was appointed, and the defeated other was taken back to Assyria and flayed. Katmuhu became a client kingdom forced by treaty to provide tribute and troops at the Assyrian king's behest.

It was with Ashur-dan's son Adad-nirari II (911–891 BC) that the period of the reconsolidation of lost Assyrian lands began in earnest, and he left behind many inscriptions detailing his military activities focusing on the highlands to the north, Upper Mesopotamia and the Babylonian border.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE KINGS OF ASSYRIA

These are the dates employed throughout the text

Adad-nirari II	911–891 BC
Tukulti-ninurta II	890–884 BC
Ashurnasirpal II	883–859 BC
Shalmaneser III	858–824 BC
Shamshi-adad V	823–811 BC
Adad-nirari III	810–783 BC
Shalmaneser IV	782–773 BC
Ashur-dan III	772–755 BC
Ashur-nirari V	754–746 BC

This process was continued even more effectively by his successor Tukulti-ninurta II (890–884 BC), who also campaigned in the north against the Nairi land, Gilzanu and Shubria, securing a large number of horses that he incorporated into the nascent cavalry arm of the Assyrian Army. Although his reign was short – just six years – the growing role of cavalry is plain to see in the reliefs depicting his campaigns incorporated by his son Ashurnasirpal on the walls of his palace in his newly constructed capital of Calah (Nimrud).

Although he was not at war for every year of his 24-year reign, his campaigns were not ad hoc operations but underpinned by a coherent strategy directed towards re-establishing the borders of the Assyrian Middle Kingdom.

ASHURNASIRPAL II, 883–859 BC

Notwithstanding his military achievements, Ashurnasirpal is also probably the most infamous of all the monarchs of the Neo-Assyrian period because of his reputation for pitiless cruelty. His statue in the British Museum in London (see p. 10) seems utterly devoid of any humanity and captures well the historian George Roux's description of him as 'imperious, ambitious, energetic, vain and cruel, possessed as of all the qualities and defects of his successors, the ruthless, indefatigable empire builders'. This is because, though brutality and terror are constant features of most Assyrian military campaigns, the descriptions of such in his Annals seem to reveal him to have been an individual of a perhaps sadistic disposition who seemingly delighted in the punishments he meted out.

The fate of the city of Suru of Bit-Halupe, an Aramaean state that paid tribute to Assyria and which lay some miles to the north of where the river Habur joins the river Euphrates, epitomizes the way Ashurnasirpal dealt with rebels. In 882 BC, his first year of campaigning, Ashurnasirpal and his army were initially operating in the hill country to the east of the Tigris. Having dealt with several cities there he swung his force to the north-east and the land of Katmuhu which lay many hundreds of miles to the north of Suru. It was here that he received the news that this city had risen in revolt. Hamataia, its pro-Assyrian governor, had been executed, and a certain Ahi-iababa, 'the son of a-nobody', had been brought in from the Aramaean kingdom of Bit-Adini to take his place. It must be assumed that this had been carried out with the connivance of the king of this powerful Aramaean kingdom, which was a continuing thorn in Assyria's side. Ashurnasirpal determined upon an immediate response to this blatant act of rebellion. In his Annals he tells us that he mobilized his 'chariots and armies and marched [south] along the bank of the Habur', in the process scooping up the tribute of those other kingdoms along the route who decided to placate the king in his progress: 'To the city of Bit Halupe (Suru) I drew near, and the terror of Ashur my lord overwhelmed them. The chief men and the elders of the city, to save their lives, came forth into my presence and embraced my feet saying: "If it is thy pleasure, slay! If it is thy pleasure, let live! That which thy heart desireth do!"'

THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE, 1000 BC TO 824 BC
Hattusas
KIZIL IRMAK
Gordion
Sultanhan
Kululu
PHRYGIA
Bohcha
Topada
TABAL
TIL-GARIMM
URARTU
LAKE VAN
MALATYA
Malatya
LYDIA
Shinuhtu
Golludag
BIT-ZAMANI
SHUBRIA
Amid
URARTU
CASPIAN SEA
Kemerhisaro
GURGUM
KUMMUH
Hubishna
TUWANA
Marqasi
Samsat
Tushan
LAKE URMIA
HILAKKU
Azilwandas
YAUDI
CARCHEMISH
BIT-BAHIANI
Nisibin
UPPER ZAB
Tarsus
QUE
Sam'al
Carchemish
Harran
Guzana
Hasanlu
MANNAEA
TAURUS MOUNTAINS
Hazazu
Til Barsip
Dur-Sharrukin
HABRIRUI
UNQI
Arpad
Nineveh
Zamahe
Arbil
BIT-ADINI
Kunulua
Aleppo
BIT-AGUSHI
Emar
RASAPPA
ZAMUA
Ugarit
BIT-HALUPE
ASSYRIA
Arrapha
MEDIA
HAMA
Hama
Ashur
LOWER ZAB
HABUR
LAQE
Terqa
Arvad
DIYALA
ZAGROS MOUNTAINS
Godin Tepe
Tepe Giyan
Byblos
SUHU
EUPHRATES
Baba Jan
Beirut
ARAM
Damascus
Dur-Kurigalzu
ELLIPI
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Sidon
Opis
Tyre
Sippar
ARABIA
Babylon
BABYLONIA
ELAM
Samaria
Ashdod
Nippur
Susa
ISRAEL
AMMON
TIGRIS
Jerusalem
CHALDAEA
Gaza
JUDAH
DEAD SEA
Uruk
EGYPT
PHILISTIA
MOAB
Ur
SEALAND
EDOM
N
Memphis
Phoenician city
Capital (where known)
Ancient coastline
Ancient course of river
Kingdom having ruler with
Neo-Hittite name
Aramaean name
both
Assyrian heartland, c. 1,000 BC
Assyrian Empire under Ashur-dan II (934–912 BC)
Expansion under Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III
Maximum extent of Shalmaneser III's campaigns
0
150 MILE
0
150KM
NILE
THE GULF

OPPOSITE

Assyrian revival started with the reign of Ashur-dan II in 934 BC, but it was under his son Ashurnasirpal II that the Assyrians properly began their efforts to recover what had been regarded before the Aramaean incursions and the great droughts as the *Mat Ahsur*. Many of the polities to the north-east of Assyria, to its west, across the Jazirah and to its east were brought under its aegis. Ashurnasirpal II's son Shalmaneser III carried Assyrian arms even farther afield. He made a determined attempt to bring the kingdoms of Syria to heel, but encountered ferocious opposition. When he died in 824 BC he left Assyria in a state of civil war as his two sons vied for the throne. Thereafter through to 745 BC Assyria descended into a period of weakness.

The king was not moved to forgive, and it was very definitely his pleasure to punish. And, despite the elders of the city handing over Ahi-iababa in the forlorn hope that they and it would be spared, Ashurnasirpal gave the order for his army to attack Suru:

> In the valour of my heart and with the fury of my weapons I stormed the city. All the rebels they seized and delivered them up… I built a pillar over against his city gate, and I flayed all the chief men who had revolted, and I covered the pillar with their skins: some I walled up within the pillar, some I impaled upon the pillar on stakes and others I bound to stakes around the pillar; many within the border of my own land I flayed, and I spread their skins upon the walls; and I cut off the limbs of the royal officers who had rebelled. Ahia-Baba [Ahi-iababa] I took to Nineveh, I flayed him, I spread his skin upon the wall of Nineveh.

The booty taken from this city impressed even the king, who expressed the view that its 'heavy spoil, like the stars of heaven, could not be counted'. Of significance was that it included chariotry and horses, the first reference in any Annals of these coming from Aramaean city-states.

The following year, Ashurnasirpal campaigned to the north-west of Assyria against the rebels in Halzi-Luha and the Kashiari Mountains. The fortified city of Hulai was dealt with in a similar manner to that of Suru the year before:

> The city was exceeding strong and surrounded by three walls… With battle and slaughter I stormed the city and captured it. 3,000 of their warriors I put to the sword; their spoil and possessions, their cattle and sheep I carried off. Many captives from among them I burned with fire, and many I took as living captives. From some I cut off their hands and

ABOVE

It was in the reign of Ashurnasirpal that wall reliefs, the art form that became so distinctive of palace decoration throughout the existence of the empire, came to the fore. These reliefs enable us to gain a good insight into the appearance of 9th-century Assyrian armies. Of note on the two chariots are the standards of the gods that they carry – possibly of Ishtar, the goddess of war, and Shamash. Originally, the wall reliefs would have been painted.
(© The Trustees of the British Museum)

their fingers, of many I put out their eyes. I made one pillar of the living and another of the heads, and I bound their heads to tree trunks round about the city. Their young men and their maidens I burned in the fire, the city I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire and consumed it.

TUSHAN/ZIYARET TEPE: AN EXAMPLE OF AN ASSYRIAN PROVINCIAL CAPITAL

The tell or ruin mound of Ziyaret Tepe is located in the Upper Tigris Valley to the east of the modern city of Gaziantep, in modern south-western Turkey. It rises some 70ft above the surrounding plain, which is given over to agriculture. There is nothing that could be seen prior to 2000 that would have indicated that for over two and half centuries it was the capital

of the northern Assyrian province of Tushan and carried the same name. Its purpose was to secure the province, and it served as a major military base for the Assyrian Army along with a number of large military settlements that oversaw the security of the Tigris Valley. In Year Two of his reign, Ashurnasirpal II led his army to the north-west of Assyria and during the course of the campaign in the region he took over the dilapidated settlement of Tushan. In his Annals he states: 'I took Tushan in hand for renovation, I cleared away its old wall, delineated its area, reached its foundation pit and built and completed in a splendid fashion a new wall from top to bottom.'

Although little of this wall is left, the archaeological team has estimated that its circuit was about one and a quarter miles, and while there is no preserved evidence for its height, it was probably in the region of 25ft and was served by possibly four gates. Ashurnasirpal tells us: 'A palace for my royal residence I founded inside… I took over this city for myself and stored therein barley and straw from the land Nirbu.'

The king had Assyrian citizens settled in Tushan. Storage buildings were constructed to store barley and straw, which were amassed to service the operations of the army when the city was employed as a base of operations for Ashurnasirpal's later campaigns in Shubria and Bit-Zamani. His son Shalmaneser III did the same when engaged against Urartu. The highest quantity of grain contained at the site in Assyrian times was recorded as being 38,000 litres. Tushan served as a military base throughout the time of the empire, its significance declining somewhat during the reign of Esarhaddon after he chose to advance the border northwards and annexe Shubria in 673 BC. It was turned into two new Assyrian provinces – Uppumu and Kullimeri. Tushan continued as an Assyrian fortress city until the demise of the empire.

On a number of occasions the king campaigned against Nairi and Urartu, employing the rebuilt city of Tushan as his military base of operations. It was also from Tushan that Ashurnasirpal struck out against the small state of Bit-Zamani to the west, with similar results to those described above. Given that a primary purpose of these *razzia*s was the acquisition of booty, it is remarkable what was seized and generated from even such a small principality. Apart from the 15,000 of the populace that he took 'as living captives', deporting them to Assyria, he also listed their 'spoil and possessions' and described this as '*tamartu*' – the 'spectacular gift for display' that was exhibited to the populace of the capital when the army returned from campaigning:

OPPOSITE

Ashurnasirpal was often depicted holding the bow and arrows, and in this relief the god Ashur hovers symbolically over this discussion with a high-ranking courtier – possibly one of his magnates. The man carrying his parasol is a eunuch known as *sha reshe* (those of the head), while the facially hirstute were known as *sha ziqni* (those of the beard). (Photo by CM Dixon/Heritage Images/Getty Images)

- 40 chariots 'equipped with the trappings of men and horses'
- 460 horses 'broken to the yoke'
- 2 talents of silver, 2 talents of gold
- 100 talents of lead, 100 talents of copper
- 300 talents of iron
- 1,000 vessels of copper
- 2,000 pans of copper
- Bowls and cauldrons of copper
- 1,000 brightly coloured garments of wool and linen
- Tables of *shar*-wood and 'couches of ivory and overlaid with gold' from the ruler's palace
- 2,000 heads of cattle
- 5,000 sheep

The sister of the king and the daughters of the king's nobles with their rich dowries were also taken to become part of Ashurnasirpal's harem. Before the Assyrian Army withdrew, Ashurnasirpal imposed an annual tribute made up of 1,000 sheep 2,000 *gur* of grain, two minas of gold and 13 minas of silver.

To this very substantial collection of booty acquired from just this one small state was added additional *tamartu* obtained from five countries and nine other major cities later in the same campaign. These twin aspects of plunder and tribute underpin the essentially predatory nature of Assyrian policy, something that would continue until the reign of Tiglath-pileser III.

To the south of Assyria, Ashurnasirpal launched three separate campaigns against the kingdom of Zamua in the Kashiari Mountains before he finally managed to bring it to heel. Its value lay in its position giving access to the Iranian plateau via passes in the Zagros, and much use would be made of this route in later reigns. Thereafter he campaigned extensively in the west of the Jazirah beyond the rivers Habur and Balikh, territory that had formerly been conquered in the Middle Assyrian period. And here the king was faced by one of his most intrepid enemies – the Aramaean kingdom of Bit-Adini, located within the bend of the Euphrates River. It was to take a number of years of

warfare before its king, Ahuni, reconciled himself to accepting submission to Assyria. The prize for Ashurnasirpal for this submission would be control of the routes to the Mediterranean coming from the east running across the Euphrates through Til-Barsip, the capital of Bit-Adini, and to the north at Carchemish. However, it was not until the next reign that this kingdom was brought under complete Assyrian control.

The first campaign against Bit-Adini took place in 878 BC and followed the course of the Euphrates, with the king taking the opportunity to hunt wild bulls and ostriches during the course of the march. The first city of Bit-Adini to face the Assyrians was Kaprabu, a city that was 'exceedingly strong and

ABOVE

Ashurnasirpal shown in discussion with one of his magnates. He carries both bow and two arrows while the image of Ashur flutters symbolically above him, indicating he is about the god's business. To his rear is a chariot. Note the differentials in the height and size of the figures. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

OPPOSITE

Ashurnasirpal seen on campaign in his command chariot. The king is shielded by the royal parasol. He wears his polo crown – distinguishable from that used by Babylonian monarchs, as the Assyrian one is surmounted by a small cone. In his left hand he holds two arrows, and in his right, a bow, the symbols of his prowess as a warrior. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

hung like a cloud from heaven', but Ashurnasirpal assailed it with 'mines, battering rams and siege engines'. Its fall brought Ahuni to the Assyrian king with tribute as token of his submission and hostages as surety of his vassaldom.

This was however but the prelude for Ashurnasirpal's ninth and most ambitious campaign. In the following year he crossed the Euphrates via Carchemish and marched his army in stages of 18.5 miles per day to the Mediterranean, collecting tribute from the rulers of the territories he traversed. From a number of them he also impressed their cavalry into his army as

OPPOSITE

Stele of Ashurnasirpal. In this formal image the king is shown holding his royal sceptre in his left hand, while his right is raised, forefinger pointing towards the symbols of the great gods. At the top is the horned headdress symbolizing Ashur, followed by that of the sun disc of Shamash, then the crescent and circle of Sin, the forked lightning representing Adad and finally the star of Ishtar. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

auxiliary units – this marking the first instance of something that would later become the norm. This allowed the Assyrians to substantially flesh out the size of their forces. These troops were drawn from Bit-Bahiani, Carchemish, Azullu, Pattina and Bit-Adini and were released from service only on the Assyrian return. In his Annals Ashurnasirpal states: 'I cleaned my weapons in the deep sea and performed sheep-offerings to the gods. The tribute of the sea coast – from the inhabitants of Tyre, Sideon Byblos, Mahallata, Kaiza, Amurru and of Arwad which is an island in the sea: gold, silver, tin, copper, copper containers, linen garments with muti-coloured trimmings, large and small monkeys, ebony, boxwood, ivory from walrus tusks – [this ivory] a product from the sea – [this] their tribute I received and they embraced my feet'.

The Assyrian Army returned home via the Amanus Mountains, where trees were cut down and sent back to Assyria to be employed in the building of the new capital city at Nimrud. Although the Annals imply that this campaign was one of conquest, it was just another, highly profitable *razzia.* Nonetheless, for the rulers of the neo-Hittite and Aramaean states through which the Assyrian Army had marched, this unexpected armed procession was of great concern. The last time the Assyrians had carried out an enterprise like this had been 200 years before under Tiglath-pileser I, and many of the rulers beyond the Euphrates must have wondered whether this presaged more determined Assyrian interest in the region.

The collective wealth generated by much of this booty and tribute was directed by the king towards the creation of a new capital city at Nimrud, midway between Ashur in the south and Nineveh in the north. Nimrud had been founded in the middle of the 13th century BC by Shalmaneser I and by the reign of Ashurnasirpal was somewhat of a backwater town. Nonetheless, it was at this site that Ashurnasirpal chose to create the new capital of Assyria. He proceeded to demolish the bulk of the old town and built a new city upon the site containing a large palace, which when excavated by archaeologists in the 1950s was shown to have occupied an area of some 4,000 square feet. The site was surrounded by massive walls, and a canal, the *Pati-khegalli* ('stream of abundance'), was dug to provide for both irrigation and defence. Completion

of the city in 879 BC was formally acknowledged by the king throwing a massive banquet to which many hundreds of persons were invited. He tells us in his Annals that: 'The happy people of all the lands together with the people of Kalhu [Nimrud] for ten days I feasted, wined, bathed, anointed and honoured and sent them back to their lands in peace and joy'.

That this massive project was carried out is not only a reflection of the vainglory of Ashurnasirpal, it was also the requisite symbol of the imperial ambitions of the Assyrian king. Nimrud was to remain the capital of Assyria between 879 and 706 BC.

During his 24-year reign Ashurnasirpal launched no fewer than 14 major military campaigns and as a result of these he significantly enlarged the area of territory over which Assyrian writ held sway. Indeed, the sum of these amounted to the recovery of all those territories that had been lost since the time of Tiglath-pileser I. By the time of his death due to old age, Ashurnasirpal had essentially reconstituted the territories of the Middle Empire and in doing so, raised the status of Assyria to that of the primary state of all Western Asia.

SHALMANESER III, 858–824 BC

In the course of his 34-year reign, Ashurnasirpal's son Shalmaneser III led his armies abroad from Assyria 31 times, seemingly striking out to all points of the compass and far beyond what had been regarded as the boundaries of the earlier Middle Assyrian kingdom. 'The Assyrian soldiers were taken further abroad than ever before: they set foot in Armenia, in Cilicia, in Palestine, in the heart of the Taurus and of the Zagros, on the shores of the Gulf. They ravaged new lands, besieged new cities, measured themselves against new enemies. But because these enemies were much stronger than the Aramaeans of the Jazirah or the small tribes of Iraqi Kurdistan, the victories of Shalmaneser were mitigated with failures.' (G. Roux)

Although Shalmaneser campaigned in person in the earlier years of his reign, in practice his primary concerns focused on the west and north – Syria and Urartu, especially the former, where his ambition extended to the conquest of the region to secure for Assyria its abundant wealth. Rather than address his campaigns on a year-by-year basis, we will deal with them by focusing first on Syria, Urartu and then Babylonia.

Following in his father's footsteps, in the very first year of his reign, he 'crossed the Euphrates at its flood' and took his army to the Mediterranean coast, crossing the territories of tributary kingdoms in the process. He symbolically 'washed his weapons' in the sea, ascended Mount Amanus and cut down cedar and cypress timbers to send back to Nimrud for building

ABOVE

It was in the 9th century BC and the reigns of Ashurnasirpal and Shalmaneser III that we see the first images of Assyrian cavalry. The Assyrians were the first to introduce an independent cavalry arm, though at this time it still probably played second fiddle to the chariotry. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

purposes. The lack of any description of fighting or sieges suggests that this was more of a major reconnaissance of Syria. He needed to first eliminate the still-recalcitrant Aramaean state of Bit-Adini that had caused so many problems for his father before he could realize his wider ambitions in the West. Although the king of Til-Barsip had not rebelled, Shalmaneser deemed the physical control of this state to be essential to his wider strategic objectives in Syria.

It took three years, however, for the Assyrian Army to reduce this kingdom to subservience, even though Shalmaneser tells us in his Annals: 'I drew near to Til-Barsip. The cities of Ahuni I captured. In his city I shut him

ABOVE

A chariot of the 9th century BC shown with just two horses. It is still a matter of debate whether two or three horses were the norm. Where three are shown it is suggested that the third was actually a replacement horse. Seen with it are two native Assyrian infantrymen. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)

up'. It was only in the following year with Til-Barsip still under blockade or siege that Ahuni, the same king who had submitted to Ashurnasirpal, fled the city. Til-Barsip fell during the winter of 857/56 BC but it took another year for Shalmaneser to finally capture Ahuni, as the king had found refuge on 'Shitamrat, a mountain peak, which is on the banks of the Euphrates'. Ahuni's 'gods, his chariots, his horses, his sons, his daughters, his troops I carried off and brought them to my city Ashur'. Another inscription states that he deported 87,500 'and included them among the people of my land'.

As Til-Barsip occupied a strategic position on the Euphrates with its settlement positioned on either side of a crossing point, it was subsequently employed as the launch pad for the king's martial ambitions in Syria. For that reason, it became one of the few exceptions to Shalmaneser's normal policy of reducing defeated city-states to client kingdoms, and instead it became an Assyrian province. The following summer on a visit to Til-Barsip, the king renamed it Kar-Salmanu-assared, meaning 'the emporium of Shalmaneser', with the province being placed under the oversight of his *turtanu,* the commander of the army.

In 853 BC, year six of his reign, Shalmaneser made his first overt move into Syria proper. Unlike the surprise achieved by his father when he did the same, Shalmaneser found that since that time the various kingdoms Ashurnasirpal had brought to heel had now, recognizing the threat that Assyria represented, sunk their differences and agreed to form coalitions to contest Shalmaneser's incursion. Having departed from the former Til-Barsip, which had become the Assyrian Army's base for operations in the west, Shalmaneser advanced into the plains of central Syria, where he was confronted by a substantial enemy coalition army at Qarqar. In this initial confrontation, the coalition force was under the leadership of Hadad-ezer of Damascus, Irhuleni of Hama and Ahab of Israel, with contingents supplied by 'the twelve kings of the sea coast'. Shalmaneser had to do battle with an enemy army numbering 62,900 infantry-soldiers, 1,900 cavalry troopers, 3,900 chariots and even 1,000 camels sent from as far afield as Arabia by its king Gindibu. There was even a force of 1,000 troops sent by Egypt.

FOLLOWING PAGES

The wide-ranging campaigns of the Assyrian Army required it to be able to cross many rivers. Here we can see individual soldiers employing animal skins blown up with air to help them float across, while two chariots can be seen being carried across the river in a large coracle-type craft commonly used on rivers in the Near East. It was the ability to cross rivers that successfully contributed to the tactical effectiveness of the Assyrian Army. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

ABOVE

Although strictly a scene from the reign of Ashurnasirpal, it is placed here to illustrate the appearance of cavalry as they would have appeared both in his reign and that of his son Shalmaneser III. The archers are both *sha reshe* and *sha ziqni* and have other cavalry troopers holding on to their reins as they shoot their arrows. Horsemanship was still in the process of being developed at this date. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Although scholars have expressed some doubt about the very large number of chariots that are said to have been fielded by the coalition forces, this was undoubtedly the largest force that the Assyrians had yet faced, and represented a massive mobilization of manpower and equipment in the face of what was perceived as the very genuine existential threat posed by the Assyrian Army. The presence of even the token force of Egyptian soldiers is further evidence of this. We do not know the size of the Assyrian force that opposed the coalition but it must have at least matched, or even exceeded, that of the coalition force. There is no doubt that this was a major clash of arms, but alas, we have no account of the course of the battle. Shalmaneser naturally claimed total victory. He tells us: 'I slew 14,000 of their warriors with the sword. Like Adad, I rained destruction upon them… the plain was too small to let their bodies fall, the wide countryside was used in burying them. With their corpses I spanned the Orontes as a bridge.'

That enemy losses may have always been a movable feast to suit propaganda needs is suggested by a later account of the same event claiming that he actually

killed 20,500 men. Notwithstanding the losses that Shalmaneser claimed his army had inflicted on the coalition and the trumpeting of his martial achievement in his Annals, the Assyrian Army was subsequently unable to capture either Hama or Damascus. A recurring feature of Assyrian military operations at this time and thereafter is the difficulty they had capturing the capitals and other major cities of Assyria's enemies, and Damascus was to frustrate Assyrian arms through to the reign of Tiglath-pileser III. Reading between the lines, the outcome of the battle was more of a draw, as actual Assyrian gains, be they political or territorial, were negligible.

However, Shalmaneser was nothing if not persistent. In the 840s and 830s he continued to pursue his objective of bringing the region under Assyrian hegemony, though he does not seem to have been planning to translate any conquests into provinces. That would also have to wait for another hundred years and the profound change of policy initiated by Tiglath-pileser III post 745 BC. In Shalmaneser's campaign of 845 BC he tells us that he again raised a huge army: 'In my fourteenth year of reign I mustered the people of the whole wide land, in countless numbers. With 120,000 of my soldiers I crossed the Euphrates at its flood.' And once more he found himself facing the same enemies: 'At the time Hadad-ezer of Aram [Syria], Irhuleni of Hamath, together with 12 kings of the seacoast, the upper and the lower, mustered their numerous, of countless numbers and advanced against me. I battled with them. I defeated them. Their chariots, their cavalry, I destroyed, their weapons of war I took from them. To save their lives they fled.'

And yet even with this huge army, assuming this to have been its actual size, he still could not bring the Syrian kingdoms to heel. Although some scepticism has been expressed about the massive size of the Assyrian force, the number could be reconciled if he took with him the mobilized forces of his client states and also counted all of the manpower of the supporting units attending its operation. Even if that was the case, his assumption must have been that such a massive army would have rapidly forced the issue, bringing defeat to the Damascus-led coalition. That it did not in effect must have doomed the enterprise, simply because such a vast army would rapidly have overtaxed the limited resources of any support units it brought with it and reversion to living off the land would have stripped the Syrian countryside of food resources extremely quickly.

Shalmaneser went back to Syria again in 841 BC and on this occasion he was more successful. In part this was no doubt due to the demise of the formidable leader of Damascus, Ada-idri, who had been assassinated by one 'Hazael' – derogatorily labelled by Shalmaneser as being 'the son of a nobody'. A battle was fought near to the city, around what is now Mount Hermon, in which the Assyrians triumphed. Devoid of allies, the Damascene

king had to face the Assyrian Army alone and the defeat they inflicted upon him cost him 16,000 dead. The new Damascene king retreated into his city and closed its gates in the face of the pursuing Assyrian Army. Once again, the Assyrians proceeded to lay siege to the site, but again to no avail. Unable to force the walls, Shalmaneser ordered his troops to cut down and ravage the many orchards and gardens that surrounded the city and fed its inhabitants. This was an immensely destructive procedure that saw trees and plantations that had taken decades to cultivate and grow, and whose produce was so important for the life blood of Damascus' population, laid waste in an orgy of tree felling and fire.

ABOVE

The top register on the Black Obelisk shows the king receiving 'the tribute of Yaua, the son of Humri'. This is the first instance of a king of Israel being mentioned and depicted on an Assyrian artefact. Yaua is the Assyrian rendering of the name of Jehu.
(© The Trustees of the British Museum)

OPPOSITE

The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III, which on its horizontal registers illustrates aspects of the events of the king's reign. A number illustrate the bringing of tribute, such as the two humped camels.
(© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Abandoning any pretence at siege, Shalmaneser ordered his army to march towards the coast. Assembling on and around Mount Carmel, the army and the Assyrian monarch held court and received the submission and tribute of a number of city-states, some of whom had provided opposition to him on previous expeditions into Syria. The Phoenician cities of Sidon and Tyre brought tribute, as did the king of Israel, one Humri – that is Jehu, the son of Omri, the very first biblical character to appear in Assyrian cuneiform inscriptions. Thereafter Israel was referred to by the Assyrians as Bit-Humri – the 'House of Humri'. The submission of Humri/Jehu is depicted on one of the registers on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser, which shows the Israelite monarch on his knees, paying obeisance and submitting to the Assyrian king. This campaign did not mark the final effort of Shalmaneser to subdue Syria, as he made one final attempt in 838 BC where again he tried to take Damascus, and was once again thwarted. Thereafter the Assyrian monarch left Syria well alone and focused his militant attentions elsewhere.

TO URARTU

Shalmaneser's reign marks the first time in which the new city-state of Urartu, lying to the north of the Taurus/Armenian Massif, began to make a serious impression on the southern kingdom. Urartu emerged as a full-blown state only in the 10th century BC, the coalescence of numerous small kingdoms that had formerly existed in the region. Ensconced in its heartland to the east of Lake Van and northwards of Lake Urmia, its capital was initially Arzashkun but was later moved to Turushpa by Saduri I, close to the shores of Lake Van. Territorially it encompassed most of the land that now constitutes the modern state of Armenia. Spread across the territory of Urartu, dominated as it was by high mountains and narrow valleys, were a number of fortresses, which provided the main security of the state. It was in the valleys where most of the inhabitants lived and where numerous horses were bred. Naturally enough, given the geography, the winters were hard, with many of the passes that linked the valleys being blocked by heavy snow, isolating the inhabitants therein. Urartu took advantage of the period of Assyrian internal weakness in the years following the death of Shalmaneser III in 824 BC until Assyria's fortunes revived with the accession of Tiglath-Pileser III in 745 BC. This period of relative decline permitted Urartu to expand westwards into northern Syria, where a number of Neo-Hittite and Aramaean states became tributaries to Urartu. This, however, was in the future.

Assyrian concerns in the region began when in 866 BC the local king of the time, one Arramu, had attempted to expand the territory of Shubria, the

land immediately to the north of the fortress city of Tushan and regarded by the Assyrians as part of their sphere of influence. In addition, they also advanced south and eastwards, threatening the vassal city-state of Gilzanu, a territory vital to Assyria for horse supply. Due to his involvement in Syria, Shalmaneser was unable to respond to this challenge immediately and it was not for another ten years that the Assyrian monarch turned his attention northwards. In 856 BC, Shalmaneser launched a major campaign against Urartu. Departing from the territory of Bit-Zamani (in the region of modern Gaziantepe), to the west of Tushan, the Assyrian Army advanced eastwards. The going was hard. Shalmaneser tells us: 'The mountains of Namdanu and Merhisu, I traversed. Difficult roads, steep mountains, whose peaks push up to heaven like a dagger blade, I cut through with bronze pickaxes; chariots and troops I led over them.'

There followed a list of small kingdoms of which the king states: 'their cities I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire. Their booty, their property, their goods, without number I carried off. A heroic statue of my royal self I made. The glory of Ashur the great lord, my lord, and the power of my might I wrote thereon.'

In due course, the Assyrian Army arrived in front of Arzashkun. Arramu had left the city in advance, and in typical Assyrian practice it was destroyed, with the process being described by the normal formula reserved for such operations by all Assyrians monarchs: 'I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire'. But to show that he was a chip off the old block, and that he could be as bloody as his father, Shalmaneser tells us that he erected: 'four pyramids of heads in front of its gate. Some of his people I fastened alive into these pyramids, others I hung on stakes around the pyramids'.

Shalmaneser relates that he chased after Arramu, who had sought safety on Mount Adduri with his soldiers, and that the two armies fought what he calls 'a terrible battle in the midst of the mountains; 3,400 of his warriors I slew with sword'. Yet Arramu survived, though the consequence for Urartu was that the Assyrians had brought fire and destruction to the heart of the kingdom and left it thoroughly devastated. Although Shalmaneser had not extinguished the Urartian state, he had done enough to cause Arramu to keep a very low profile from then onward. The Assyrians saw fit to direct another campaign against Urartu in 831, some years after the first. By this date, it was led by the *turtanu,* Dayyan-Ashur the commander of the army, as Shalmaneser was in his dotage and incapable of leading it himself. By this date Urartu was ruled by Saduri I, who founded the dynasty that would rule the state until its demise. Although in his Annals Shalmaneser claimed an Assyrian victory, it would seem that this expedition was a failure inasmuch as the account was not attended by the usual description of the fruits of victory.

ASSYRIAN IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY

The ideology which justified and underpinned Assyria's aggressive policy towards others was derived from a religious mandate. The Assyrian monarch was never regarded as divine, but was nonetheless more than just an ordinary person. His role was that of the representative of the god Ashur and he was charged at his coronation with executing the divine will of the god, as was heard in the coronation hymn of Ashurbanipal when the priests, acting as the mouthpiece of the god, gave the new king 'a sceptre to extend the land and his people'.

This notion that the king of Assyria was charged by his god with extending the land under his rule and control has a provenance extending back to the Middle Assyrian Kingdom and was understood to be the most fundamental charge laid upon him. The king was constantly to advance the frontiers of his realm and to establish justice and peace. It follows that only by bringing all lands under the control of Assyria, and thus into the domain of Ashur, can other lands at present beyond the god's remit be at peace. Thus, conquest and incorporation into Assyria or simply being brought under its aegis must be beneficial to the people concerned, even if it might involve features of Assyrian policy that those who were its victims found terrible.

The king also had to secure divine permission to engage in military conquest. The king petitioned the god through the priesthood, putting his questions to the god as to whether it was acceptable to engage in a specific military campaign. Indeed, the army could not launch *any* military campaign unless it had been positively mandated by the god. This mandate was revealed through omens and oracles mediated by the priesthood. In many cases the god's will was discerned by the reading of the entrails of an animal – this being called extispicy. The affirmative reading of a sheep's liver would yield a response from the priest, as if speaking for the god, and is found encountered in the Annals or elsewhere as 'having the support of Ashur and the great gods', or alternatively 'Go, do not be afraid, I will be at your side'. Throughout the period, campaign reports start with an almost formulaic introduction, as in the Annals of Ashurnasirpal II, where he says: 'he placed his merciless weapon in my lordly hands and sternly commanded me to rule, subdue and direct the lands and mighty highlands. With support of Ashur my lord, I kept marching the difficult routes'. Almost until the end of the Assyrian Empire we find kings embracing these sentiments and employing them in their accounts of their campaigns, even if the wording differs somewhat.

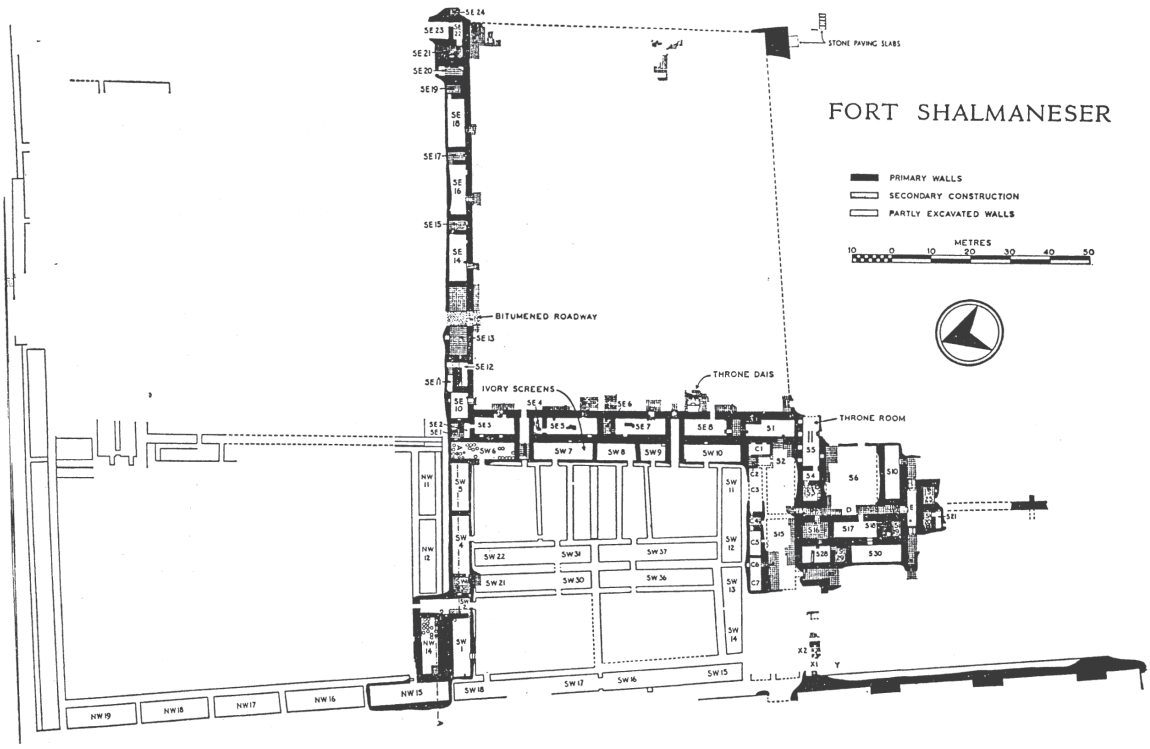
Since Assyrian monarchs were inculcated with this view of the world and how it operated from the day of their birth, it is simply implausible to

think that they did not believe this to be case. There was then no doubt in their minds that whatever method was employed to yield the god's will, the positive response to embark upon a new campaign – and the response of the god always seems to coincide with the king's desire – meant that when the armies of Ashur did emabark upon a new war, the King of Assyria had the support of the god.

As the chosen of Ashur, the king understood himself as the 'instrument' of the god. What the god commanded the king then executed, thus realizing the will of the god. This notion was not in any way unique to Assyria. All war in the Ancient Near East was religious war and came about because of the will of the gods. That the kings of Assyria and the people of Assyria were assured of the superiority of Ashur as 'the king of the gods' thus flowed as a matter of course from the remarkable success of the Assyrian Army in war and the massive extension of Assyria's empire.

Shalmaneser's operations in the north were not confined just to dealing with Urartu. In 837 BC he campaigned to the north-east to bring to heel the city-state of Que in order to secure the trade route from Anatolia that ran through it. This region is better known as Cappadocia. But it took a second campaign in 833 and 832 BC for the region to submit and become a tributary kingdom to Assyria, as did the city of Tarzi (Tarsus). These operations marked the most westward advance of the Assyrians up to that time, and also the last of Shalmaneser's conquests in the west. The region from Tarsus southwards to Byblos now acknowledged the overlordship of Assyria.

Babylonia had not been ignored during Shalmaneser's reign, though matters to do with this region were of a lesser concern than those in Syria and elsewhere. Nonetheless, Shalmaneser's reign had begun with a peace treaty between Assyria and the Babylonian king Nabu-apal-iddin. But with the latter's death, the kingdom was plunged into civil war as his two sons vied for the throne. In 851, the rightful heir, Marduk-zakir-shumi, appealed to Shalmaneser for help against his younger brother. To that end the Assyrian monarch mobilized his army and marched southwards along the east bank of the Tigris, where he defeated the younger brother Marduk-bel-usate and devastated the region of Gannanate, where in its city of the same name the usurper had holed up. The following year the king repeated the march south and on this occasion caught up with the younger brother and killed him in battle. Shalmaneser was welcomed in Babylon, being given a great reception by the priesthood of Marduk, the city's foremost deity. Marduk-zakir-shumi swore fealty to Shalmaneser with Babylon. Shalmaneser then marched his


FORT SHALMANESER
PRIMARY WALLS
SECONDARY CONSTRUCTION
PARTLY EXCAVATED WALLS
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10 0 10 20 30 40 50
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BITUMENED ROADWAY
IVORY SCREENS
THRONE DAIS
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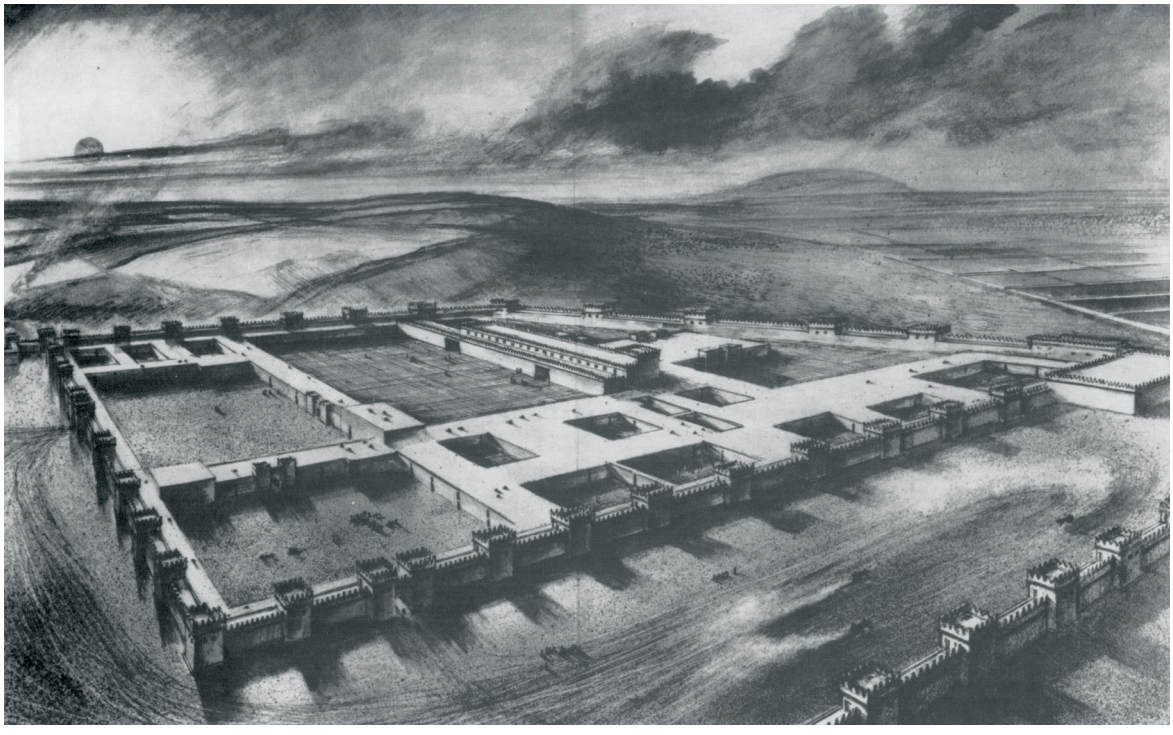


OPPOSITE TOP

A ground plan of the *ekal masharti* in Nimrud, named by the archaeologists who excavated it in the mid-1950s as 'Fort Shalmaneser', for it was built by this Assyrian king. It was an extensive construction, containing many rooms under cover as well as a number of parade grounds where horses and troops were trained as well as reviewed by the king when the army was mustered at Nimrud for a coming campaign. (British School of Archaeology in Iraq)

OPPOSITE BOTTOM

An artist's impression of Fort Shalmaneser. As can be seen from the previous plan, there are myriad rooms under cover. It was in these that many broken cuneiform tablets were found which, when reconstructed, contained much information about matters such as booty and horse deliveries. Within the inner walls of the fort the training of chariot teams and cavalry was undertaken. In the bottom right of the picture chariots can be seen. Sargon II built an *ekal masharti* in Dur-Sharrukin and his son, Sennacherib, built one in Nineveh. (British School of Archaeology in Iraq)

army southwards into the Sealand to deal with the Chaldaean tribes ensconced therein, who were already becoming a problem, 'chasing them unto the shores of the sea they call the Bitter River'. The Chaldaeans were still in the process of consolidating their hold on southern Babylonia and had yet to make their presence felt in a major way within the region.

THE AGE OF THE MAGNATES

By the late 820s BC Shalmaneser was a very old man with sons waiting for him to die. However, one of them could not wait. In 827 BC Ashur-danin-apal rebelled in a bid to secure the nomination as his successor. But this was more than just a power grab. Whilst no doubt Ashur-danin-apal wanted the throne, the rebellion he led was symptomatic of wider dissatisfaction within the populace of Assyria, for whom he became the figurehead. As the king's power had declined as he entered his dotage, several of his magnates had taken the opportunity to usurp his authority and had begun to exercise his powers themselves.

No fewer than 27 cities of Assyria, including Ashur, Nineveh, Arrapha and Arbail – the heartland cities of the kingdom – rose up in revolt. Although he was now confined to his palace in Nimrud, Shalmaneser still retained sufficient of his faculties to order his second son, Shamshi-adad, to put down the rebellion. It took him five years to suppress the rebels, who had 'brought about sedition,

OPPOSITE

A stele of Shamshi-adad V (823–811 BC), the youngest son of Shalmaneser III who came to the throne after defeating his brother in the civil war that broke out towards the end of his father's long reign. He raises the forefinger of his right hand in a gesture of respect to the gods whose symbols can be seen in the top left-hand section of the stele. In his left hand he holds the royal sceptre. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

rebellion and wicked plotting' to the kingdom in what erupted into a full-scale civil war. Although emerging victorious in this and becoming king after his father's death in 824 BC as Shamshi-adad V, his victory had been won with the help of his magnates, and far from reducing their power, as victors, they expanded on what they already had and became even more powerful. This was certainly the case with Shamshi-ilu, who remained *turtanu* over four reigns. The measure of his reach was the power and influence he asserted even as that of the central monarchy waned. He appropriated to himself the royal prerogative in launching campaigns west of the Tigris from his provincial city of Kar-Shalmaneser (the old Til-Barsip). Although the monarchy and dynasty survived, it was on the sufferance of the magnates and the degree to which the throne was prepared to buy them off. It would be many decades before a king emerged who was strong enough to trim their wings and put them in their place.

The decline in central power accelerated when in 810 BC Shamshi-adad died and his successor and son Adad-nirari III was just a minor. In an unprecedented step, his mother, Shammuramat, exercised the role of guardian and ran the state. It was some years before Adad-nirari came into his majority and even after his mother's death in 798 BC his power remained limited. Despite this, Adad-nirari was able to embark on quite a number of military campaigns, with no fewer than 13 being launched into western Iran between 809 and 787 BC. It is very likely that one of the reasons for the preoccupation with this region was the need to acquire a large number of horses as the growth of the army's cavalry arm required an ongoing supply. It is also in this region that the Assyrians were beginning to combat the eastward expansion of the new kingdom of Urartu. However, there was slippage in the west, to which only four campaigns were directed. Nor was Assyria in a position to do much about rectifying a declining security situation on the southern border with Babylonia, where Aramaean tribes – especially the Itu'eans (of which we will hear much more post 745 BC) – were generating chaos alongside other tribes in the 'kingdom'.

Adad-nirari felt obliged to nominate a 'strong man' with the appointment to that position, in approximately 787 BC, of one Shamshi-ilu, who became the

most powerful of all the magnates in the kingdom for the next 40 years. The death of Adad-nirari III in 783 BC marked the beginning of a massive decline in Assyrian influence that lasted through to 745 BC. None of the three of Adad-nirari III's sons who succeeded him was able to wield sufficient influence to recover the power and authority usurped by Shamshi-ilu. In consequence, the period from 783 BC saw a weakened monarchy, with this individual not only having inscriptions made out in his own name but also leading military campaigns against the rising power of Urartu, as well as claiming the credit for their victorious outcomes.

The reigns of the sons of Adad-nirari III took place amid the backdrop of vassal states in the west and north-west slipping the leash of Assyria and being subverted by the rising power of Urartu. Taking advantage of perceived Assyrian weakness, it now moved eastwards into northern Syria and Anatolia. The transfer of these city-states' submissions from Assyria to Urartu saw the emergence of a bloc of hostile kingdoms in those regions that blocked the trade routes and denied Assyria access to metals, wood and other resources vital to its economy. If Assyria was to retain its strength and influence, it would need a more dynamic and forceful king on the throne of the kingdom, and it took until 746 BC for that individual to emerge.

TERROR IN THE SERVICE OF EMPIRE

While the Assyrians were not the only power in ancient or modern times to consciously employ terror in the course of their military operations, no other has ever made such a virtue of its employment. Consequently, for those whose only acquaintance with Assyria comes from the pages of the Tanakh/Christian Old Testament, they receive a very poor press.

The Assyrians' deliberate employment of terror in the service of their empire was a conscious policy throughout the history of the empire, and not just an aberration on the part of one particular monarch. The Annals of numerous kings carry many asides about the very conscious use of terror, even if such references are not always couched in the explicit bloodthirsty descriptions one finds in the Annals of Ashurnasirpal II – his inscriptions are always employed as the exemplars. For example, in a recent translation of Sargon's 'Letter to the god' concerning his 714 BC campaign against Urartu, he states that in the course of his destructive progress through that kingdom the previous year 'I left behind a terror never to be forgotten', and referring to Urartu's allies 'Zikikirtu and Andia, I bespattered with the venom of death … over all of his mountains, every one of them, I spread

terror; wailing and lamentations I laid on the enemy peoples'.

In most cases the 'terror' meted out by the Assyrian Army is to be understood as operating within a religious ideological framework wherein its exercise follows the breaking of an agreement, oath of submission, etc., which had been structured so that: 'the deities (Ashur first of all, followed by the other Assyrian "great gods") not only fulfilled the role of guarantors but were in fact a contracting party. Any transgression of the oath was a "sin", perpetrated not against the Assyrian king but against the gods: the inevitable punishment was determined by the gods, with the king and his army having the role of material executors – corresponding perfectly with the basic principle of the Assyrian king as the "chief executive officer" of the god Ashur'. (S. Holloway)

Notwithstanding the ideological dimension, at base the application of deliberate terror was meant to function as a deterrent. 'I left behind a terror never to be forgotten' is the essence of this policy – that the memory of the appalling atrocities meted out by the Assyrian Army would be enough to cause those on whom they were inflicted never again to rebel against the Assyrian king.

This policy of deliberate terror can be contrasted with the assiduous concern expressed by an Assyrian king that deported populations be supported when being taken into exile. Assyrian monarchs could be merciful when they chose. Rebellious cities were not always destroyed, this occurring more often in the later empire period.

It was not just foreigners who could be on the receiving end of punitive treatment. There are plenty of examples of Assyrian laws as they applied to Assyrian citizens being hedged around with vicious punishments should they be broken. Native Assyrians were imbued as a matter of course with the notion that physical punishment was the consequence of law breaking. They were conditioned to the acceptance of the infliction of pain and atrocity for wrongdoing in their own daily lives, so that they also accepted being told to inflict the same on others who were rebellious, who had defied the god and were therefore guilty of having broken their god-sworn oath to the king and were deserving of the most painful of punishments.

Even those in the military had to contend with the threat of physical punishment from others in the hierarchy. A famous example, thought to date from the reign of Sargon II (721–705 BC) and found in a communication from the king to one of his ranking officers, if accepted at face value, illustrates the point: 'Get together your prefects plus the horses of your cavalry collection points immediately! Whoever is late will be impaled in the middle of his house… Don't delay; leave our business and come straight away'! Even for its own populace, Assyria was an extremely harsh and brutal society.

CHAPTER THREE

ASSYRIA, 745–720 BC

TIGLATH-PILESER III, 745–727 BC

It was only in 746 BC that the political paralysis that had afflicted the Assyrian state for the previous 36 years was finally ended, when a bloody coup launched in the capital city of Nimrud led to the assassination of the king, Ashur-nirari V. It is perhaps no coincidence that this occurred within a short time after the demise of the military strongman Shamshi-ilu, who is thought to have died sometime between 752 and 745 BC. The individual who took Ashur-nirari's place was known as Pulu, and he was supported by a coterie of high-ranking military and palace officials who clearly believed that he possessed the necessary abilities to restore the fortunes of the Assyrian state. In this matter they were most assuredly correct, for under his chosen throne name of Tiglath-pileser III he has come to be viewed as one of the seminal figures of the Ancient World. Indeed, the selection of his regnal name was indicative of the new king's ambition to emulate the martial achievements of the first royal ancestor to bear that name.

OPPOSITE

Tiglath-pileser III is regarded by many scholars as the greatest of the Assyrian kings. He came to the throne in 745 BC following a coup and was thus a usurper. He is credited with transforming Assyria into an empire by the introduction of provinces and the extension of the boundaries of the kingdom through a major series of conquests. He also instigated a major transformation of the army, and was the first monarch to indulge in the practice of the mass deportation of peoples. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

But who exactly was Pulu? His identity has been the subject matter of intense discourse among Assyriologists for many years and there exists no definitive proof of his ancestry. It is generally accepted that he was of the ruling royal family, and very probably a son of Adad-nirari III and thus a brother to the assassinated king. He only ever mentioned his ancestry once, and that on a minor inscription on a brick from Ashur, where it states that he was the son of the aforementioned king. This has led some to assert that he was a usurper in that he was not the designated successor to Ashur-nirari V and thus destined to rule. He is thought to have been aged between 40 and 50 when he came to the throne and clearly had experience as a proven military leader of high rank. He had served as governor of Nimrud and also as a high-ranking courtier in the palace of the king. He was thus a known quantity to the magnates who supported him in the coup that brought him to power. It was certainly the case that Pulu was party to the the planning and its execution and rewarded those magnates who had supported him, as was the case with the palace herald, Bel-Harran-Belu-usur, who was later reconfirmed in that role after the coronation by way of reward.

Pulu was crowned on the 13th day of the month of Ayyaru in 745 BC in Ashur. A mere six months later he embarked on his initial military campaign, which took the Assyrian Army southwards into Babylonia. However, before we chart his martial achievements, which in the space of the 18 years before his death in 727 BC created the Assyrian Empire upon which his successors built and expanded, we need to examine the radical policies that underpinned his rule and created the structures which would dominate the Ancient Near East through to 612 BC.

We have no insight into the new king's thinking at the time of his elevation to the throne, but much can be surely inferred by the decisions he made. He had clearly reflected upon the changed international scene facing Assyria with the emergence of powerful new enemies such as Urartu and had determined that it was now incumbent upon him to fundamentally change the way the power and influence of the Assyrian state was extended and maintained. Expansion now needed something more radical to underpin it than the translation of defeated enemies into tribute-yielding client states. This relationship of client states linked to the central government had shown itself inadequate, with constant military intervention being needed to suppress attempts to throw off the Assyrian yoke. That policy had been acceptable when the *razzia*s conducted by the army had not taken it too far abroad from the homeland. But ever since the reign of Shalmaneser III and his wide-ranging campaigning they had brought in their wake numerous rebellions and conflict with other city-states that could not be subdued or brought to heel.

The most important of these, as we have seen, was Urartu, which had emerged by 745 BC as Assyria's primary strategic rival. This city-state had expanded into Northern Syria during the period of Assyrian weakness and was now intent on dominating the region, its control interrupting and potentially denying to Assyria the vital metals, timber and horse supplies that flowed along the trade routes from Anatolia through Syria, and which were crucial to its ability to function as a military state. Tiglath-pileser clearly saw that if Assyria was to flourish, then expansion and a shift towards a properly imperial posture based upon the annexation of defeated enemies in regions of strategic importance was now needed to control these strategic trade routes. The resultant year-on-year military campaigns were governed by the need to achieve this overarching strategic objective. The new territories conquered and city-states defeated would be annexed and turned into Assyrian provinces overseen by either a 'district lord' (*bel pihati*) or an appointed 'governor' (*shaknu*). The acquisition of booty and tribute was to be replaced by taxes levied on the new province, whose collection would be overseen by the governor. The table provided below indicates those territories that were captured and turned into provinces by the time of Tiglath-pileser's death in 727 BC.

744 BC	In the first campaign into the Zagros the Assyrian Army defeats and captures Parsua and Bit-Hamban. These are both turned into provinces.
740 BC	The city of Arpad, capital of the state of Bit-Agushi, is conquered and annexed after a three-year siege.
738 BC	The city-states of Unqi and Hatarikka are conquered and annexed.
737 BC	The second campaign into Median territory leads to the annexation of further territories around the provinces of Parsua and Bit-Hamban.
732 BC	Campaign in Syria leads to the final capture of Damascus. Galilee in Israel and the Transjordan are also captured, with all three territories being annexed.

The creation of new provinces went hand in hand with a very conscious policy of reducing the power of the magnates within Assyria so that they would not be able to usurp the power and status of the king. However, the king waited until 738 BC, the seventh year of his reign, before enacting this policy. No doubt he needed to feel secure on the throne so that those who would lose by this decision would not be in a position to challenge his authority by reducing their land-holdings and the resources that had underpinned their

power. To facilitate this, existing provinces were reduced in size – this applied primarily to those that had been established in the Jazirah during the period of the *reconquista* as they were substantially larger than those of the home provinces – which were extended in number. Their power was diminished by virtue of their being subsumed within a far larger number of provinces, as all of the newly created provinces were to be governed by appointees of the king whose loyalty could be assumed – often these were eunuchs. The expression 'I placed a eunuch of mine as provincial governor over it' becomes a common refrain in the Annals. These eunuch governors had been raised since early childhood within the palace and, lacking a family, had no temptation to see their province and the power and wealth it brought to them as something to pass on to offspring. Their loyalty lay solely with the king and they thus provided an effective balance to the power of the magnates.

THE KINGS OF THE IMPERIAL PERIOD

Tiglath-pileser III	745–727
Shalmaneser V	726–722
Sargon II	721–705
Sennacherib	704–681
Esarhaddon	680–669
Ashurbanipal	668–627*
Ashur-etil-ilani	627–624*
Sin-shar-ishkun	623–612*

* Asterisks against a number indicate uncertainty about exact regnal date.

Governors who were appointed to oversee the reduction of captured territory and its translation into a province did so according to a uniform procedure. Following the destruction of many of a conquered territory's principal cities, the next stage involved the large-scale deportation of its population. After destruction came reconstruction. Tiglath-pileser gave a description in his Annals of how this was carried out, which can serve as an exemplar: 'On top of a ruin heap which is called Humur I established a city. I built and completed it from the foundations to its parapet. A palace for my royal residence I built there. I named it Kar-Ashur. I set up the weapon [the garrison] of Ashur, my lord, therein. I settled therein people of foreign lands, conquered by me. I imposed on them tribute and I considered them inhabitants of Assyria.'

The last major change introduced by Tiglath-pileser III concerned the make-up of the Assyrian Army itself. Since the reign of Ashurnasirpal II the army had been manned by predominantly ethnic Assyrians, but Tiglath-pileser III saw a significant enlargement of the army and the conscription into its ranks of many non-Assyrians. From 745 BC through to the end of the empire the Assyrian Army is better described as a multi-ethnic, imperial force.

THE MILITARY CAMPAIGNS

The first blooding of the Assyrian Army under Tiglath-pileser III occurred barely six months after his coronation, with an expedition southwards into Babylonia to deal with the problems generated by the Aramaean tribes settled on the eastern bank of the Tigris. Although Assyria had always experienced difficulties on its southern border with Babylonia, in this case the problem had arisen because of the blocking of the southern trade routes by the Aramaeans and the Chaldaeans. On this occasion, however, Tiglath-pileser chose not to deal with the latter or make any attempt to annexe Babylonia, leaving its king Nabu-nasir on the throne. Bringing the Aramaeans back under control and freeing up the trade routes were Tiglath-pileser's main aims.

The Assyrian advance moved south from the border until it reached the line of the river Uknu. In his Annals the king lists no fewer than 16 Aramaean tribes that he 'marched against' and also the cities that he 'exercised authority over' as far as the river Uknu which lay on the shore of the Lower Sea (the Persian Gulf – at this time the coastline of the Gulf lay much farther inland than it does today). This campaign also marked the first occasion that the new monarch exercised his policy of deportation, described as follows: 'From those Aramaeans who I deported, I distributed and settled… thousand to the province of the turtan, 10,000 [to] the province of the palace herald,… thousand to the province of the chief cupbearer… thousand [to] the province of the land Barhalzi [and] 5,000 to the province of Mazamua. I united them, [considered them] as inhabitants of Assyria, [and] imposed the yoke [of the god] Ashur, my lord [upon them] as Assyrians.'

The period of political weakness preceding Tiglath-pileser's accession did not, it would seem, impact in any profound fashion upon the effectiveness of the Assyrian Army.

In the following year the king led the army eastwards into the Zagros Mountains via the Zagros Gates, subduing the territories of Parsua and Bit-Hamdin, both of which were turned into provinces – the first two created under Tiglath-pileser's new policy. These placed the Assyrians near the horse-rearing regions of Media, which were to become ever more important as the

ABOVE

A detailed scene from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III shows an unnamed city under siege in mountainous terrain by the Assyrian Army. Moving from left to right we have Neo-Hittite/Anatolian auxiliary troops storming the city walls using ladders. The ladders are angled to permit them to ascend without using their hands and so carry both spears and shields. On the right of the image we have the city walls under attack by a siege engine using battering rams. The engine itself is on four wheels and is protected by a leather coverall shielding the crew within. The coverall is reinforced with small metal shields. Above the siege engine is a standard artistic trope of such Assyrian scenes – prisoners who have been impaled. The two archers of the *kisir sharruti* are protected by soldiers shielding them with large wicker shields that stand above head height. The archer would shoot, then skirt back behind the shield to reload another arrow. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

empire expanded. And it is this that probably explains the king's decision to revisit Media seven years later in 737 BC and which led to further annexations of territory around the two pre-existing provinces of Parsua and Bit-Hamdin as 'far as the city Zakruti of the mighty Medes'.

But it was in 743 BC that Tiglath-pileser came to grips with what was the primary opposition facing him and the biggest task to be addressed by the Assyrian Army up to that time – the growth of Urartian power and influence. Crossing the Euphrates he led his army into Syria and the Levant, there to do battle with a coalition of Neo-Hittite and Aramaean kingdoms led by Mati'ilu of Arpad, Sulumal of Meliddu, Tarhulara of Gurgum and Kushtashpi of Kummuh – all Urartian vassals. The initial attack was directed at the city of Arpad, which was placed under siege until its fall two years later in 740 BC. It then became the capital of a new Assyrian province. Even as the siege began, the mass of the Assyrian Army deployed to do battle with the coalition and the main Urartian Army led by its king Sarduri III.

The two armies met in battle in the region of Kistan and Halpi, to the north-west of Kummuh. It would seem the Assyrians caught their opponents unawares when they were in camp and achieved total surprise. There is a suggestion that the Assyrian king was informed of this by the king of Kummuh, who was a reluctant vassal of Urartu. As is usual with Assyrian battles, we have no detailed account of its execution. However, it was an undoubted Assyrian victory and a decisive one, although the account in the Annals is damaged and there are many omissions in the cuneiform text. Nonetheless, as is the norm, the king claims to have slaughtered many of the enemy troops and 'filled the gorges and precipices of the mountains with their bodies'. Such was the rapidity of the Assyrian advance on the battlefield that Sarduri abandoned it post haste and fled, leaving behind his royal tent with its contents, with the cuneiform account derogatorily observing how the Urartian king did so on the back of a mare! (This latter observation, also used elsewhere, was a deliberate impugning of Sarduri's masculinity – Assyrian soldiers always rode stallions.) The defeat the Assyrians inflicted on Urartu on this occasion marks the high water mark of the latter power's attempt to assert hegemony over northern Syria.

The next few years saw Assyrian arms directed at other outposts of Urartian influence. The campaign of 739 BC saw a major assault on the city-state of Ullaba, which lay on the edge of the heartland of Assyria just 60 miles from Nineveh, albeit separated from it by Mount Nal. In the 'great game' being played between Urartu and Assyria, Tiglath-pileser responded to intelligence that the Ullabians and their allies, with the support of Urartu, were preparing an invasion of Assyria, and struck first. If the intention of Urartu was to relieve the pressure by the Assyrians on

their western front in Syria, they were to be thwarted as Ullaba was conquered and turned into a new province, with the Annals stating that the king appointed 'a eunuch as provincial governor over it'. The Urartians could not have been unaware that possession of this territory provided the Assyrian king with an excellent springboard for an assault on their country, and although a further campaign against Mount Nal was needed in 738 BC, the following year saw a invasion of Urartu itself.

It is unfortunate that the details of Tiglath-pileser's invasion of Urartu are poorly documented as the cuneiform record is so badly preserved. That being said, in essence the Assyrian Army marched through Urartu right up to the gates of the capital city of Turushpa, where a major defeat was inflicted upon the Urartian Army. Though unable to breach the walls of the city, Tiglath-pileser humiliated the Urartian king by erecting a stele with his image on it in direct view of the city. Thereafter he tells us: 'For a distance of seventy leagues I proudly marched through the extensive land of Urartu from one end to the other, and I had no opponent therein.'

The recovery of Assyria's premier position in the Near East had been one of Tiglath-pileser's primary objectives when he came to the throne in 745 BC. Although ostensibly about the recovery of vassal states that had rebelled against Assyrian overlordship, his campaign was essentially about the reduction of the influence and power of Urartu – the only existing power at the time that could challenge Assyria's pre-eminence. But as that city-state could succeed in doing so only when Assyria was weak, once the latter was ruled again by a strong king its military recovery was bound to entail the systematic reduction of Urartu's power. The northern power never recovered from the Assyrian invasion and was never again able to extend its influence into Syria.

Having eliminated the threat from Urartu, Tiglath-pileser's next target was the subjection of the territories of the Levant southward through to the Egyptian border. In 738 BC he had been forced to lead a campaign into northern Syria in response to the formation of an anti-Assyrian coalition under the auspices of one Azriyau of Yaudi. Although assisted by a number of cities from along the north Syrian coast, the coalition had been rapidly vanquished. Unqi and Hatarikka were both annexed and turned into provinces. A measure perhaps of the trepidation that the Assyrian conquest had generated was that kingdoms that had not been part of the coalition had nonetheless determined that in the circumstances, discretion was the better part of valour, and moved quickly to pay tribute to the Assyrian king. These included Que, Kummuku, Sam'al, Carchemish, Gurgum, Melid, Tabal and Kaska, most of whom had submitted to Shalmaneser III many years before but had since slipped the Assyrian leash. Nor had many of the rulers of southern Syria been oblivious to the implications of Tiglath-pileser's victory

in the north, as they too quickly moved to pay tribute to the Assyrian ruler. These included Damascus, Byblos, Tyre, part of Hamath, the northern kingdom of Israel and the Arabs.

Four years later, in 734 BC, Tiglath-pileser returned to the Levant, as many of the states that he had subdued or that had rendered tribute to him in 738 BC had joined together in an anti-Assyrian coalition embracing Israel and others under the leadership of Damascus. Tiglath-pileser accused Tyre, Ashkelon and Samsi, Queen of the Arabs, of having either joined or at least tacitly supported the revolt. Judah under its king Ahaz refused to join the coalition, possibly despite being attacked by Damascus and Israel. In 734 BC Judah was regarded by Assyria as a vassal state; however, it is doubtful, as the Bible suggests, that the Assyrian king was prompted to intervene against the coalition by the appeal of Ahaz for assistance from him – notwithstanding that by virtue of being a tributary to Assyria the Judaean king was entitled to call on his lord to protect him.

Tiglath-pileser however had much larger matters to address, principally the seizure of the ports of the Levant and Philistia down to the Egyptian border, the destruction of the Damascus-led coalition and the conquest of its members. As the process of achieving these objectives took the three years between 734 and 732 BC, it makes sense to see the Assyrian operations in those years as being stages in the same military campaign. It is perhaps pertinent to ask at this stage what prompted the members of the coalition to believe they could take on the Assyrian Army with any hope of success. Even their collective military power was nowhere near what would have been necessary to effect such an outcome. The only reasonable answer is that the leaders of the coalition had either been led to believe or had presumed that the Egyptians would come to their assistance, something that Assyrian intelligence would presumably have made known to Tiglath-pileser.

This would go some way in accounting for the strategy the king adopted in 734 BC, which was to strike first at the coastal cities of Phoenicia and the southern Levant including Tyre and Sidon, then southwards to the Philistine cities of Ashdod, Ashkelon and Gaza. The aim was to subdue them and gain control of the lucrative south Arabian incense and other trades which routed through the city of Gaza and the Philistine cities. Assyria and Egypt were competing for control of the those cities as well as the immensely lucrative trading ports of the Phoenician Levant. In that sense, this was a further example of Assyrian military activities being used to dominate the region in order to economically exploit it to the benefit of Assyria. This region had historically been of great importance to Egypt for the same reason. Evidence for Egyptian involvement in Palestine and Phoenicia goes back at least as far as the Old Kingdom. The Assyrian conquest would also serve to make a very

ABOVE

An Assyrian camp is shown on this relief. Within the circular representation of the large tent there are several different activities taking place: preparation of food; divination in the form of the reading of the internal organs of an animal; and other activities. Outside grooms attend to the horses, some of which are drinking or eating. One groom is seen brushing down the coat of a horse. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

strong point to Egypt that it would not profit it to intervene in the Levant. With Egypt rendered pliable by this demonstration of military power, the king could then return northwards and set about demolishing the coalition.

At the start of the campaign Tiglath-pileser proceeded to march his army southwards along the Levantine coast. The route that the king and his army took has been the subject of much academic debate but one of

the most favoured, and this is what will be assumed, saw the Assyrian Army advancing southwards along the coast via the cities of Simirra, Tyre, Akzib, Akko, Dor, Ashkelon and Gaza. Hanunu, the ruler of the latter, chose to abandon his city rather than be captured by the Assyrians and fled to Egypt. On a tablet found at Nimrud in 1950, Tiglath-pileser related: 'As for Hanunu of the city of Gaza, he became frightened by my powerful weapons and escaped to Egypt. I conquered the city Gaza, his royal city, and I carried off… talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, people together with their possessions'.

Hanunu, it seems, was sent back to Gaza, as the Egyptians took the view that it was better not to anger the Assyrian king and his army on their border. He was reinstated to rule his city once again, but he paid a heavy price. Tiglath-pileser stated how he took with him back to Assyria: 'Hanunu's wife, his sons his daughters… his property and his gods'. Tiglath-pileser also established an

Assyrian trading centre in the city and the border with Egypt was established at Nahal Musri, the so-called 'Brook of Egypt', with a stele of himself placed there to demarcate it.

The following year the campaign against the coalition began, with its initial focus on Damascus led by its king Rezin. A battle was fought which the Damascenes lost, prompting their king to retreat behind the walls of his city, which was placed under blockade. Although Tiglath-pileser described the condition of the enemy king as being shut up 'like a bird in a cage', the 45-day blockade proved to be abortive. To satisfy the king's frustration, which mirrored that of his predecessor Shalmaneser III when he had also unsuccessfully laid siege to Damascus over a hundred years before, soldiers were ordered to attend to the destruction of Damascus' 'gardens… plantations, which were without number, I cut down, not one escaped'. This served to deprive the inhabitants of the city of the food that the trees and 'plantations' would normally have provided after the Assyrian Army had left. Meanwhile, the hinterland of the city was effectively laid waste, with 591 cities from 14 different districts of Aram being destroyed and reduced to 'mounds left by a flood'. The ancestral home of Rahianu was taken and sacked, with all its inhabitants being deported to elsewhere in the empire.

No doubt in high dudgeon in consequence of being denied the capture of Damascus, the Assyrian king ordered the blockade abandoned and instead redirected his army to attack the camp of 'Samsi, queen of Arabia', as she had violated the 'oath she had taken by Shamash'. In consequence of this victory over Samsi, other Arab tribes came to the camp of Tiglath-pileser and he generously accepted their submission. This served to detach the Arab tribes from the coalition and delivered the control of the desert to the Assyrians. The queen also suffered the loss of 1,000 persons, most likely her soldiers, who were deported. The city-states of Amon, Edom and Moab also submitted to him and paid tribute. The historian Peter Dubovsky described the consequence of these events thus:

> Tiglath-pileser III was able to form a semicircle with his allies (Philistia-Judah-Edom-Moab-Amon-Gilead) surrounding the Ephraimite part of the rebellious coalition. This enclave separated the Syro-Ephraimite coalition from its major support – Egypt… The result of this military strategy was quite impressive… The Assyrian allies and kingdoms encompassed Israel on three sides. The conquest of Gilead and the victory in the field battle in the environs of Damascus meant that both epicenters of the rebellious coalition – Samaria and Damascus – were separated from each other. As a result Damascus not only lost its food supply but remained isolated in the middle of conquered territory.

In 732 BC Tiglath-pileser moved to finally defeat these two rebellious kingdoms. It is unfortunate that the detailed Annals for that year are missing, but it is nonetheless possible to narrate the outline of events.

The first objective of the Assyrian Army was Damascus, and on this occasion it must be assumed the city fell relatively quickly. Surrounded by kingdoms and city-states now in thrall to Assyria, and with its hinterland having been devastated the previous year, it is likely that the population of Damascus may well have been starving. In the wake of its fall Rahianu was executed and the city and surrounding territory reorganized into another Assyrian province. With the end of the coalition the new eunuch governor of Damascus also found the Transjordan and territory as far south as Abel-Shittim added to his province.

The final act was the reduction of Israel. To that end, Tiglath-pileser moved his army into Galilee, in the east of the country, and with the Israelite Army unable to withstand the Assyrian advance, it rapidly succumbed to the conscious policy of devastation that brought the country to its knees. The following cities, as cited in the Second Book of Kings verses 15 and 29, were destroyed: Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janaoh, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, Galilee and the land of Naphtali. The Book of Chronicles also states that the persons deported came from the tribes of the Gadites, Reubenites and the half tribe of Manasseh. The archaeological record attests to the devastation and the subsequent deportation of the populations that led to the abandonment of numerous cities, towns and settlements, many of which were rebuilt only many years later. Archaeological surveys of Lower Galilee have pointed to a widespread depopulation in the rural areas, and the number of deportees following in the train of this destruction is given in the Assyrian Annals as 13,500 persons. In all probability these people ended up being taken to Assyria itself, where they found themselves settled in the cities and involved in agricultural activity, taking the place of the natives whose losses were increasing due to the almost annual campaigning by the king.

That Israel was not annexed in its entirety seems to have been a result of the demise of its king and a new occupant of the throne – one Hoshea – deeming it expedient to be seen to be decidedly pro-Assyrian and proffering tribute to the Assyrian monarch, post haste. In consequence, Tiglath-pileser left Samaria as a rump tributary 'state', thus enabling it to survive for another 12 to 13 years, before it, too, was finally extinguished.

The dramatic outcome of this three-year military operation was that all the territories of southern Syria, the northern and southern Levant now lay under Assyrian domination, with the larger part of these regions annexed directly to Assyria and made into provinces. However, it is significant that neither the kingdoms of Philistia nor Judah were turned into provinces (apart from Ashdod

ABOVE

Tiglath-pileser III is seen here in his command chariot outside the city of Astartu that lay to the east of the Sea of Galilee, in modern Jordan. In his left hand the king holds a fly whisk while he raises his right hand in a gesture of salute. To his rear, a young eunuch holds a parasol over his head to shield him from the fierce sunshine. The fall of Astartu occurred in *c.*734 BC and it was incorporated into a new province. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

in 712 BC). They retained their status as tributary states until the final withdrawal of Assyria in the later 7th century. This was despite further rebellions and Assyrian military operations to suppress them – normally the precipitant of the process of turning such into provinces. Why did this not occur?

This was a consequence of Tiglath-pileser's strategy for containing Egypt, one which was followed by his successors. The Assyrian-Egyptian border was established at the 'Brook of Egypt' with the Arab Mu'na tribe under its chief Idibi'ilu, who, having rendered tribute to Tiglath-pileser, was appointed to supervise the immediate border region. A key element in the Assyrian strategy for the defence of the southern border against any attempt by Egypt to encroach upon Assyrian interests was the strategic role to be played by Philistia and Judah. Although tributary states, their role was perceived to be that of buffer kingdoms against possible Egyptian incursions into Palestine – with Judah having oversight of its southern bordering desert regions of the Negev and the Sinai. They were thus perceived as playing a significant role in imperial defence. This remained constant during the later reigns of Sargon II and Sennacherib, even in the face of the devastating campaign waged by the latter against Judah in 701 BC.

INTO BABYLONIA – AGAIN

If any one problem dominated Assyria's energies down through to the fall of the empire, it lay in its ongoing attempt to bring to heel its southern neighbour, Babylonia. Tiglath-pileser's very first military campaign after his accession to the throne in 745 BC had been a limited one in which he led his army south into northern and eastern Babylonia to stabilize the central government by dealing with the recalcitrant Aramaean tribes. He was not to resurrect his interest in that land until 729 BC, having spent the previous year, one of the very few in his reign, in Assyria, and not on campaign.

That he had not moved to annexe Babylonia 16 years before had no doubt been governed by an awareness that he may not have wanted to become embroiled in the seemingly ongoing problems and antagonisms between the traditionally minded urban native Babylonian elites, and the Aramaean tribes and Chaldaean strong men, which resulted in a perpetual and decidedly volatile political environment. Events, and his perception of how they threatened Assyrian interests, now served to change his mind. This was prompted by a report that, in 731 BC, a certain Mukin-zer, the head of the Chaldaean Bit-Amukkani tribe, had seized the throne of Babylon. At the time the Assyrian king was campaigning in Syria with his army, but the usurpation of the Babylonian throne by a Chaldaean ensured a future Assyrian intervention in the southern kingdom.

Why was this the case? Conquest of territory was, as we have seen, a divinely sanctioned imperative for all Assyrian monarchs. Though it was ever present, it was not the overriding motive in this case, however; certainly economic factors were. Babylonia was the nexus for many of the major trade routes that fanned out to different points of the compass from southern Mesopotamia. Moving clockwise, these included the route along the Euphrates that ran northwards into Syria and to the Mediterranean. Another made passage through the Zagros into Iran, another southwards into the Persian Gulf and another made tracks into the Arabian Peninsula. Control of such a trading hub would be of immense economic advantage to Assyria. It would ensure that virtually all the trade routes that crossed the Ancient Near East would be under Assyrian control and thus amenable to Assyrian taxation and oversight. In addition, Tiglath-pileser was intending to do more than just bring a degree of order to the southern kingdom; his operations there would also serve to strengthen Assyria's southern border – an ever-problematic matter in the relationship between the two kingdoms. Intelligence reports from within Babylonia relayed to the king indicated that Mukin-zer was not well-regarded in all quarters of the population. Thus Assyrian intervention would be well received by many Babylonians who were not at all sympathetic to Mukin-zer, a Chaldaean, and it would thus help the establishment of good relations between Assyria and its southern neighbour.

However, this operation would certainly cause to raise the hackles of the kingdom of Elam, which had already seen its own trade route northwards through to Urartu and Anatolia blocked by Assyria due to the establishment of their new provinces in the Zagros. Support of the Chaldaean usurper might have provided the opportunity for Elam to rectify this situation, but if there was any intention to do so, the Assyrian monarch checkmated the kingdom at the outset of his campaign, as Tiglath-pileser moved first to neutralize any possibility of intervention from that quarter.

His army advanced southwards, departing from the province of Arrapha, moving along the eastern bank of the Tigris River before advancing to Babylon's eastern border with Elam to block any potential intervention. Only then did he move farther into Babylonia. Having secured Babylonia's northern cities and Babylon itself, the Assyrian Army followed Mukin-zer southwards into the Sealand, devastating the holdings of his Bit-Amukkani tribe and those of his allies the Bit-Sha'alli and the Bit-Shilani, with 55,000 and 50,400 respectively of these tribes being deported. It is at this point, when the leaders of the two largest of the Chaldaean tribes came to Tiglath-pileser to submit, that the name of Merodach-baladan, the leader of the tribe of Bit-Yakin, is heard for the first time. This individual would in due course become the bane of several Assyrian monarchs, causing them endless troubles in Babylonia in

ABOVE

This plate illustrating Tiglath-pileser III in his war/command chariot clearly shows the manner in which the chariot had evolved over the years. The wheel is formed now with eight spokes rather than six, and the cab is both higher and more square in profile. The king's chariot may have been pulled by four horses, but this was not commonly seen until the introduction of the much larger chariot in the following century. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)

the near future. The submission of this man was significant because as Tiglath-pileser stated, 'he was king of the sea-land, of whom none in the time of the kings my fathers had come into the presence, they had not kissed their feet.'

A cuneiform letter to the king had in the meantime reported on the surrender of Babylon: 'To the king my lord, your servant Ashur-shallimanni: Good health to the king, my lord! We got together on the twenty-sixth, stood in the presence of the commander in chief and gave orders to one another. We arrived within the city gate and inflicted a defeat: Mukin-zer has been killed and Shumu-ukin, his son, had also been killed. The city is conquered. The king, my lord, can be glad.'

The Assyrian monarch now decided to assume the kingship of Babylon himself – the first Assyrian monarch to do so – with the Babylonian Chronicle recording his ascension in the following fashion: 'Tiglath-pileser went down to Babylonia [Akkad], ravaged Bit-Amukani and captured Mukin-zer. Mukin-zer reigned three years over Babylon. Tiglath-pileser ascended the throne of Babylon.'

The Assyrian monarch was formally invested as king of Babylon when in 729 BC, he 'took the hand of Marduk' in the Akitu or New Year Festival. The Babylonian king list attributed two years, 728–727 BC, to his reign as king of Babylon, wherein he was called Pulu. His dynasty, which included his son and successor Shalmaneser V, was given the name of 'the Dynasty of Baltil' – Baltil being one of the names the Babylonians attributed to the city of Ashur. The campaign in Babylonia, which lasted three years, was the king's last, for he died in 727 BC.

The legacy of Tiglath-pileser III was remarkable. Not only did he double the size of the empire in the space of his reign, but he also totally reorganized the manner whereby it was ruled. Whereas in 745 BC conquered states were linked to Assyria by treaty and rendered annual tribute, many of those city-states conquered by him had instead been turned into provinces. The scale of his achievement was both huge and profound in its consequences, such that the Assyriologist Eckart Frahm has described his achievement by the time of his death in 727 BC thus: 'The enormous size the Assyrian state had reached by 729 BC and its even larger sphere of influence, the complex mechanisms of political and economic control established throughout the realm, the state's multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic character, and the osmotic imbalance between centre and periphery – all these features justify calling Assyria, from the time of Tiglath-Pileser onwards, an empire *stricto senso,* probably the first in world history'.

Although others have argued that Akkad qualifies as being the first in the 3rd millenium BC in terms of many of the features that characterize later

empires such as territorial extent, administration and so on, Assyria set the model for those that came after. Nor could it be denied that Assyria was a militarist state par excellence. But by the time of Tiglath-pileser III, a stage had been reached whereby for Assyria 'militarism denoted the point at which war was no longer an instrument of policy, but the policy goal itself, and "a military economy" where the mode of production pertained not just for the soldiers, in one economic sector, but at the level of the state as a whole. By these standards the Assyrian state following 745 BC qualifies, for instance, since it was no longer possible for the state to do without the financial and ideological income produced by the execution of warfare – as an "addiction model of imperialism"' (S.F.C. Richardson,).

THE SHORT REIGN OF SHALMANESER V (ULLALAYU), 726–722 BC

The designated successor and crown prince succeeded to the throne of Assyria without dissent in the month of Tebetu (December–January). He adopted the regnal name Shalmaneser V at his coronation in Ashur, but he was also known by his nickname Ullalayu – in all probability one arising from his birth in the month Ululu (August–September) and used by him in letters to his father. He also inherited the title of King of Akkad (Babylonia). However, Assyriologists have the problem that very little in the way of evidence has survived from his reign, leaving us in the main ignorant about any major military, political or other activities undertaken by him in the few short years he occupied the throne. There is however the suggestion that he annexed Sam'al and Que, turning them into provinces.

The one significant event that can be credited to Shalmaneser V of which we do have evidence is that he laid siege to Samaria in the rump kingdom of Israel, which was described as little more 'than a tidbit to be gobbled up at the first opportunity by the ascendant Assyrian state'. (Becking). That Shalmaneser moved against Samaria was due to the decision by its king Hoshea to raise the banner of rebellion by choosing to renege on his promise to pay tribute to Assyria made to Tiglath-pileser III some years before. On the face of it, this was an act of madness, knowing as we do how the Assyrians would react to such a blatant act of rebellion. That he nevertheless did so seems to stem from Hoshea's conviction that the Egyptians would come to his aid and that it was this that prompted him to end tribute payments to Assyria. Alas for him, for it was a forlorn hope.

The Assyrian Army moved against Israel quite rapidly, devastating the countryside around it then moving in to lay siege to Samaria itself. As was the

case with other heavily defended capital cities that the Assyrians had laid siege to, Samaria's walls denied Shalmaneser a rapid victory. The city of Arpad had fallen only after a siege of three years in 740 BC, and it took a similar number of years before Samaria too fell. The actual fall of Samaria is a matter that has provided fertile ground for many academic papers, dissertations and books – all focusing on the issue of whether it was Shalmaneser V or his successor Sargon II who can claim the credit for it. However, Bob Becking, a scholar of this period, in a work devoted to 'The Fall of Samaria' (see bibliography) has suggested the following chronology of events of the final years of the northern kingdom of Israel.

725 BC	Expedition against Israel by Shalmaneser V. Israel becomes vassal of Assyria once again.
725 BC	Beginning of the siege of Samaria.
723 BC	Shalmaneser V conquers Samaria.
721 BC	Sargon II accedes to the throne of Assyria. A major rebellion breaks out in the west.
720 BC	Sargon II campaigns in the west. Fights battle at Qarqar. Takes Samaria. Converts it into Assyrian province and names it Samerina.

The demise of Shalmaneser V and the elevation to the throne of Sargon ushered in the dynasty of the Sargonids, who were to rule Assyria down to the empire's end.

ASSYRIAN DEPORTATION POLICY

'The people of the land, male and female, small and great, without exception, I led them forth. I counted them as spoil.'
Ashurbanipal

The policy of deporting the populations of defeated kingdoms/city-states had a long provenance in the Ancient Near East as a punishment for rebellion even before the existence of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. We find it mentioned in the epilogue to the Code of Hammurabi, and the policy was employed by the Egyptians and Hittites. However, it was never practised on such a massive scale as it was after 745 BC under the triumvirate of kings, Tiglath-pileser III, Sargon II and the latter's son Sennacherib. There is certainly evidence that in the Neo-Assyrian period

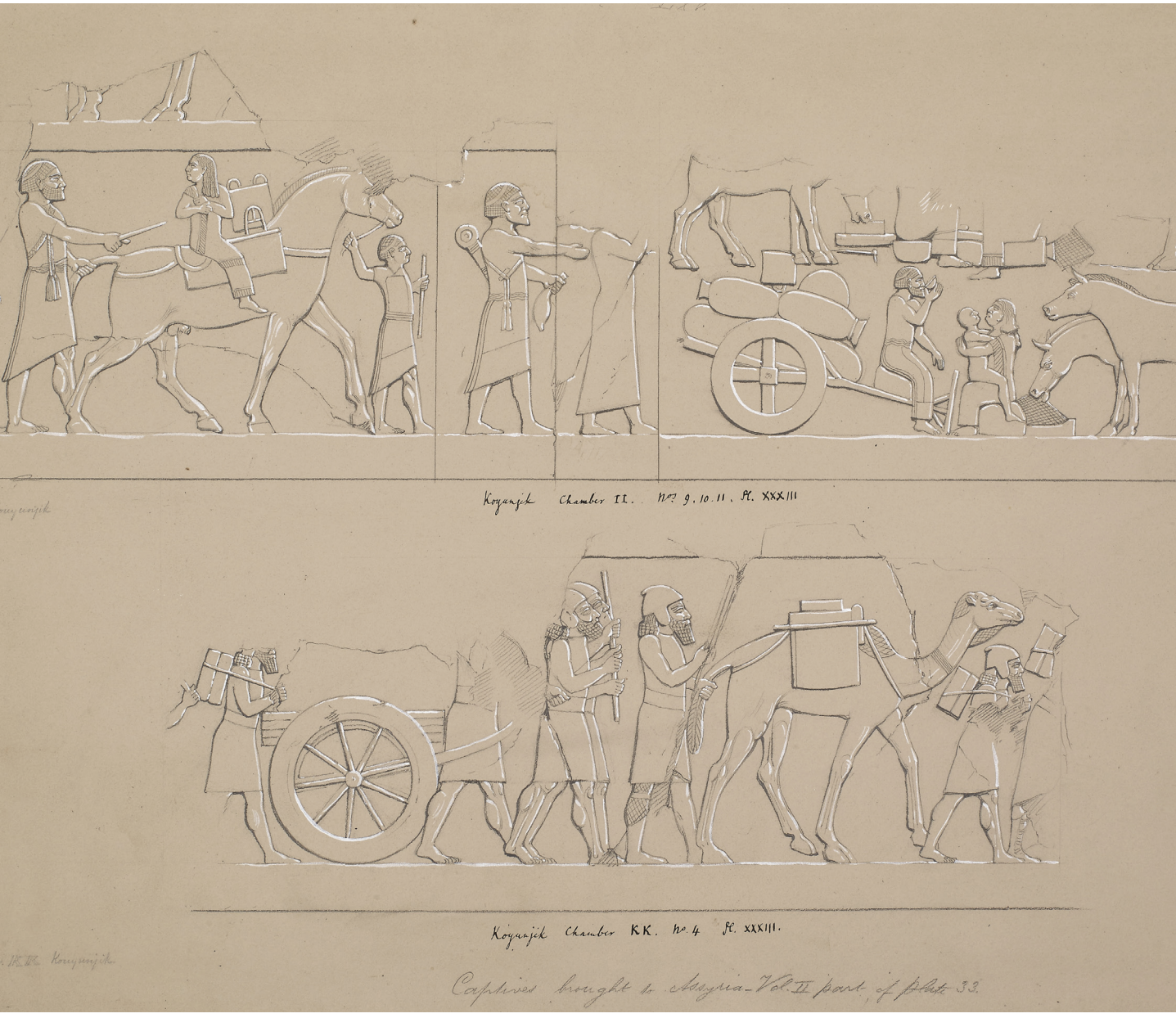
deportation took place even earlier than the reign of Ashurnasirpal II, and as a policy continued, albeit at a reduced level, from the reigns of Esarhaddon and through that of Ashurbanipal.

Assyrian sources employed by academics to total the numbers of persons who were deported are matched, if not exceeded, by other known cases of deportations where the numbers of persons involved were not recorded. It is for that reason that the global total of those deported found at the end of this box is an educated estimate secured on the basis of known figures.

Predating Tiglath-pileser's more intensive use of the policy beginning post 745 BC was the manner in which the threat of deportation was used against any city-state that had entered into a covenant with Assyria, whether in consequence of defeat in war or through voluntary submission. This was the preferred method of harnessing such city-states to do Assyria's bidding in the period prior to 745 BC. It was 'written' into the covenant between Assyria and the city-state concerned that deportation was the punishment that would follow should the city-state in question renege on its agreed terms. The outward measure of adherence to any covenant was the annual payment of the tribute – the *madattu* – laid down by the Assyrian king at the time it was entered into. The failure to render the agreed tribute signalled to Assyria that the city-state concerned had rebelled, breaking the covenant which was not just with the king of Assyria but also with the gods who had witnessed and sanctioned the original agreement. It was at the behest of these gods, as mediated by the priesthood, that the king of Assyria was required to visit the inevitable punishment on the offender. The brutal treatment meted out by the Assyrian Army to the rebels was followed by deportation, and this was viewed as the ultimate punishment that could be inflicted on a rebellious kingdom.

This is exemplified by Adad-nirari V (754–746 BC), who had stated in his agreement with Mati'ilu of Bit-Agushi that if his kingdom: 'sins against this treaty [i.e. breaks its terms]… Mati'ilu together with his sons, daughters, officials and the people of his land will be ousted from his country, will not return to his country and not behold his country again.'

This also explains the fate of many thousands of Jews from the kingdom of Judah who were deported after its king, Hezekiah, chose to abandon the payment of tribute to Assyria after 705 BC. He thereby signalled his repudiation of the covenant his father Ahaz had concluded with Tiglath-pileser III in 732 BC. This would bring upon his kingdom the inevitable Assyrian response. According to the Annals of Sennacherib, he deported over 200,000 Judaeans in 701 BC. It is thought however that this may have been an exaggerated number, but whatever the true figure, the number



ABOVE

A drawing copied from an Assyrian wall relief illustrates the preparation of deportees for their long journey to wherever it has been willed by the Assyrians that they will go. Mules and a camel can be seen for beasts of burden and in the lower register the journey has begun. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

taken severely impacted on that kingdom for the next century. This number is only slightly less than the 208,000 that Sennacherib had ordered deported in his first campaign in Babylonia two years before.

It is with the accession of Tiglath-pileser III that deportation becomes an important and systematic element in a drive to translate Assyria into a properly imperial power. Deportation was employed in the first instance as a device to weaken states that were deemed to threaten the realization of Assyria's expansionist objectives. In this case, deportation was employed at the outset following the defeat of a kingdom and served Assyria's objectives in a number of ways. Deportation served to decapitate the political class of the defeated city-state, depriving it of any residual leadership group and thus potential opposition to Assyria. This group would have included selected members of the city-state's royal family and its primary courtiers, servants, specialists and scholars. In 28 cases of deportation, some or all of the deportees were simply described as soldiers; in eight other cases they are labelled as craftsmen. 'It is therefore clear that the Assyrians did not restrict themselves to a particular class or social group, but deported various elements of the population of a defeated country.' (B. Oded)

Those left behind would find themselves now living in an Assyrian province governed by a governor and paying regular taxes to the central Assyrian state. They would normally find within a short time that those who had been deported would be replaced by incomers – deportees from other parts of the empire. On the basis of what is known, it would seem, however, that those brought in to replace those deported were lesser in number.

Deportations were also intended to service the Assyrian state's economic objectives, as relocated populations would be escorted to a designated new area of settlement. Despite the vicissitudes of the actual journey, which must have carried off more than a few deportees (and others who succeeded in running away), it was the Assyrian king's intention to ensure that as many of them arrived in as good a condition as possible in order to quickly become effective and productive members of the empire. To that end it was also the case that where men were deported, their families went with them to lessen the psychological dislocation of losing hearth and home. This would serve, it was hoped, to permit the deportees to set down roots in their new places of abode. This also applied to those men taken into the Assyrian Army such as the Samarian charioteers introduced by Sargon II. The Assyrians also deported whole communities for the same reason, as they were 'anxious to preserve the community life of the deportees by resettling them together as homogenous small groups, as far as kinship, religion and culture were concerned'. (B. Oded)

It follows that the process of deportation and the trek of the deportees was planned with the peoples concerned being fed and watered on the way. After all, they were seen as a potentially very important economic resource for the Assyrian state. It is for this reason we see Assyrian kings describing themselves as 'gardeners' and the deportees as 'plants' to be replanted in fertile, new soil. In a letter to Tiglath-pileser III from one of his officials: 'As for the Aramaeans about whom the king my lord has written to me: "Prepare them for their journey"! I shall give them their food supplies, clothes, a waterskin, a pair of shoes and oil. I do not have my donkeys yet, but once they are available, I will dispatch my convoy.'

The central administration in Assyria developed a sophisticated and intricate process for overseeing the deportees, with registers of the people concerned being drawn up according to age or profession. The very same logistical structure that served the army was also required to service the needs of the deportees. Nor did oversight end with the arrival of the deportees at their destination, as can be seen in this letter by the same author as that above: 'As for the Aramaeans about whom the king my lord has said: "They are to have wives!" We found numerous suitable women but their fathers refuse to give them in marriage, claiming: "We will not consent unless they can pay the bride price." Let them be paid so that the Aramaeans can get married.'

In one of the primary texts dealing with this phenomenon it is noted that in 59 instances (which comprised about 85 per cent of all the cases where the destination of deportees is known) the deportees were brought to Assyria, mainly to its principal cities – Ashur, Nimrud, Nineveh and Dur-Sharrukin. This certainly led to a substantial growth in the urban areas of Assyria, which led in due course to a substantial dependence on the agrarian economy to supply their needs. This could be catered for when climatic conditions were favourable, but once these became inimical, as it seems they did from the mid-7th century onwards, then the sheer size of the cities created major problems.

Deportations to Assyria were said to come from the 'four corners of the earth'. It is clear that the overriding priority was to enlarge the population of Assyria itself. Certainly, the addition of such manpower must have been needed to compensate for the number of Assyrians who died in war, as it followed that those deportees, settled in the Assyrian homeland and in consequence viewed as Assyrians, were also liable in due course to military call-up, under the *ilku* obligation.

There was also the notion, notwithstanding those other reasons for the policy of deportation addressed above, that the mixing of populations

within the empire would over time lead to the emergence of a more homogenous population wherein such persons might well come to see themselves more as 'Assyrians'. It is certainly the case that the longer-term policy of deportation and the fact that many of those deported came from an Aramaean culture led to the emergence of Aramaean as a lingua franca for the empire. Although Akkadian was still the official language, beyond that, it was increasingly the case, even in Assyria itself, that Aramaean was used on a day-to-day basis by the ordinary people and no doubt in the army too.

To conclude this section, it has to be noted that arriving at a figure for total deportations is problematic by virtue of the fact that two-thirds of those listed deportations carry no figures for the number of deportees involved. But according to Oded, 'What can be said, albeit not without hesitation, is that through statistical calculations based upon the numbers (some of them probably exaggerated) we do have, we arrive at an estimated total of four and a half million deportees over a period of three centuries.'

CHAPTER FOUR

SARGON II, 721–705 BC

As was the case with Tiglath-pileser III, it appears that Sargon II was a usurper. That much is suggested by the fact that, as with his illustrious predecessor, Sargon never mentioned the name of his father in all of his myriad surviving inscriptions bar one very obscure entry on a glazed plaque whereon he states that he was a son of Tiglath-pileser III. There are those who do accept this as a true statement of his origins. However, given how illustrious the memory was of that former king, it is most strange that this new one would not have trumpeted that familial relationship. Those who claim he was a usurper also point to his choice of regnal name – '*Sarru-kenu*' meaning 'legitimate king' – a strange choice, if indeed he was. In the translation from Akkadian into English his name is rendered as Sargon II – a very conscious reference to the great king of the third millennium BC, Sargon of Akkad, who was also a usurper.

The new king ascended the throne in Ashur on the twelfth day of the month of Tebetu in 721 BC. There was certainly opposition to Sargon's

OPPOSITE

It is thought that Sargon II was also a usurper, but as with Tiglath-pileser III he proved himself to be a great conqueror and added even further to the territories of the empire. He is seen here with a senior member of his court to his left, thought to be his son the crown prince Sennacherib. During his father's reign the crown prince did not accompany his father on his campaigns, but stayed in Nimrud overseeing Assyria and compiling intelligence that he forwarded on to his father. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

accession, with the new king having to spend the first two years of his reign suppressing this, and the first deportation of the many of his reign came when 6,300 'guilty Assyrians' – those who had opposed his accession – were dispatched into exile in Hamath.

Even as this was taking place, simultaneous revolts broke out in Babylonia and Syria. The accession of a new king seemed to offer some city-states the best opportunity to throw off the Assyrian yoke and make a bid for freedom. This could be at best only temporary, for the failure to pay tribute was viewed by their Assyrian overlord as rebellion which opened the way for inevitable military retribution. In this matter the Assyrians were relentless, even if it was sometimes a few years in coming. This delay was a consequence of distance and the reality that the Assyrian Army could deal with only one major problem at a time. However, the might of the Assyrian Army made it very unlikely that any one power, or even coalition of powers, could deny the northern Mesopotamian superpower's intentions or designs at this point in the empire's history, whatever the initial confusion fostered by Sargon's accession (the same mistake would be made with the accession of his successor). Notwithstanding these observations, the year 720 BC would subsequently prove to be a very busy one for Sargon and his army, seeing it initially engaged on the borders of Babylonia and then before year's end marching westwards, then south through the Levant and into Philistia before ending up at Raphia on the border with Egypt, a round trip of 1,650 miles from Nimrud.

The initial matter that Sargon addressed was that of rebellion in Babylonia. In the month of Nisannu of 721 BC, Merodach-baladan, whom we last met in the reign of Tiglath-pileser III when he made submission to the Assyrian king, seized the Babylonian throne. As leader of the Chaldaean tribe of Bit-Yakin he was an influential figure in Babylonia and the possessor of a keen and acute political mind which, allied to a deep hatred of Assyria, saw him emerge as the *bête noir* of Sargon and his successor. This rebellion and seizure of the

OPPOSITE

A scene repeated whenever and wherever the Assyrian Army laid siege to and captured an enemy city. In the aftermath Assyrian soldiers leave the destroyed city festooned with booty. This will be taken to the camp where scribes will list it and it will be amassed for carriage back to Assyria where they would become *tamartu* at the end of the campaign – that is 'spectacular gift for display'. This was shown to the population in the capital city, much as the Romans did in their triumphs, as evidence of the prowess of the king and of the army of Assyria in bringing wealth back to the homeland. In that sense it illustrates the very essence of Assyrian imperialism.
(© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Babylonian throne marks the beginning of a century of deep enmity and ferocious wars with Assyria with the Chaldaeans emerging as the most intransigent foes. However, the Chaldaeans did not oppose the Assyrians alone and it is from this date we also witness the much greater involvement of Elam in Babylonian affairs such that on many occasions the Assyrian Army found itself opposing both the Chaldaeans and the Elamites.

It was the Elamite king Humbanigash who lent his support to the new Babylonian king, and in 720 BC Sargon led his army south, fighting a major battle with the Elamite Army near the Assyrian-held city of Der, which lay between the Tigris and the Zagros rivers. Occupying a strategic position, controlling as it did the main road between Assyria, Babylonia and Elam, as well as being a major settlement astride the east–west trade route, it was thus of interest to both Assyria and Elam. It was the Elamite king, however, who initiated the battle, advancing northwards in a bid to capture the city, but Sargon reacted sufficiently quickly to meet the enemy army in the vicinity of it.

The Elamite Army was a formidable foe and, although Sargon claimed victory, the Babylonian chronicle claims that the Assyrians were defeated. The outcome of the battle was at best equivocal, as another ten years would elapse before the Assyrian king once more turned his attention southwards. Whatever the outcome, it was sufficient to stabilize Assyria's southern frontier with Babylon, which was enough for Sargon to turn his attention to the north-west and deal with the rebellion in Syria, which was in all probability a greater priority. Nor did the king wait until the following year, for with matters in the

south having taken perhaps at the most six weeks, he now marched his army towards Syria. That he chose to move so quickly is indicative of the perceived importance and vital need for a pacified Syria and southern Levant to the security of the Assyrian Empire.

CAMPAIGNS IN THE WEST OF THE EMPIRE

In the wake of the death of Shalmaneser V and the subsequent confusion in Assyria, city-states that had fallen to Tiglath-pileser III some ten years before determined to make a bid for freedom. Their revolt was fomented by one Yau-bi'di who, having seized power in Hamath, encouraged the leaders of Arpad, Damascus, Gaza, Hatarikka and Simirra to join with him in throwing off the yoke of Assyria and readying themselves for the inevitable response. In the intervening years, many of these cities had recovered and rebuilt their militaries, but all recognized that they could take on Sargon only as a coalition. For the Assyrian king, Yau-bi'di was an object of derision, described in derogatory terms as: 'a camp follower, with no claim to the throne, an evil Hittite'.

In a manner that prefigured the killing of any Roman found in Asia Minor, in 89 BC Yau-bi'di fomented an organized campaign whereby any citizen of Assyria found in these provinces/city-states was killed. Such behaviour crossed a threshold. Not only would these Syrian cities now have to fight, but they knew that Sargon's vengeance in the face of this action would be ferocious.

The coming campaign in the west posed a great challenge because the subjugation of all these rebellious city-states would entail the Assyrian Army having to reach down as far as Gaza in the southern Levant – a return trip of some 1,650 miles from Raphia on the border with Egypt and back to Nimrud, posing a great strain on logistics. Sargon may have divided his army from the outset of the campaigning season, employing only a smaller force to deal with Der and the Elamites. If that was Sargon's strategy, then he may have sent the bulk of his army towards Syria under the command of his *turtanu*, joining it after dealing with his southern border.

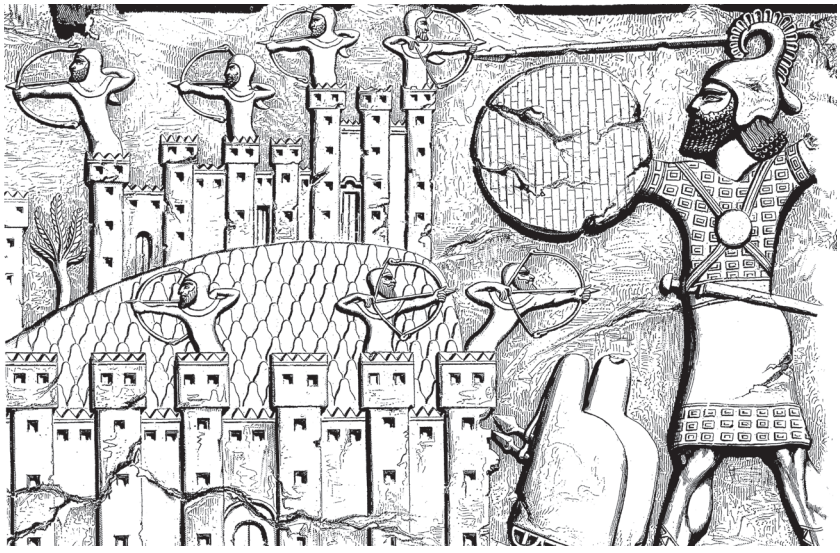
By the time he arrived he probably already knew that the enemy coalition was assembling for battle on the plain of Qarqar, the scene of several battles in the previous century during the reign of Shalmaneser III. For Sargon, this was fortuitous. A major battle wherein he would confront and hopefully defeat the forces of all the rebellious city-states opposing him in Syria would permit a rapid termination to the rebellion, assuming that in the wake of their defeat his enemies would seek to cut their losses and rapidly resubmit to Assyria, obviating the need for a lengthy campaign involving sieges. Of the battle that

followed, the only account we have is that of the Assyrians with Sargon claiming a triumph over Yau-bi'di: 'I mustered the masses of Ashur's troops and at Qarqar, his favourite city, I besieged and conquered him, together with his warriors. Qarqar I burned with fire.'

Yau-bi'di had fled into the city where he was captured, sent back to Ashur and flayed there, with his skin being dyed red. This scene is depicted on a relief in Dur-Sharrukin. His city of Hamath and its lands were 'destroyed like a flood', with many of the populace being deported to Assyria. Archaeological excavation has revealed that the devastation at Hamath and Tell'Acharneh to the south of Qarqar was extensive.

Following a major demonstration of Assyrian power along the Phoenician coast directed at the cities and trading centres of Arwad, Ba'il-gazara and Sinnu, Sargon turned his army inland towards the rump of the northern Hebrew kingdom of Israel and its capital city of Samaria. We have already noted the problem regarding which Assyrian king had captured this city; the assumption here is that it fell to the former king in 722 BC after a siege of three years, but that in the next two, it fell into the orbit of Yau-bi'di and joined the coalition. Turning inland, the Assyrian Army traversed the short distance from the coast to the city of Samaria, which surrendered quickly to Sargon. Rather than destroy the city, the Assyrian monarch chose to rebuild it, and it thereafter become the administrative centre of a new province called Samerina. If the fabric of the city was essentially spared, the price of rebellion was paid by its population, with Sargon telling us: 'I fought against them with the power of the great gods, my lords, and I counted as spoil 27,280 people.'

The people were deported. The Second Book of Kings in the Old Testament says of their fate: 'The King of Assyria deported Israel to Assyria and settled them in Halah, on the Khabur, the river of Gozan and in the towns of the Medes'. This deportation was not immediate, and according to Becking it probably did not take place before 716 BC. Although some rather fanciful accounts have been woven around the fate of these deportees, there is absolutely no reason to suppose that they ended up elsewhere from where the biblical passage says they did. However, their longer-term fate was to be assimilated among the local populations of these regions, with their Hebrew identity being lost. Certain individual names have come down to us – a certain Sama, for example, a deportee from Samaria, ended up serving the Assyrian king at his court and advising him about matters to do with his homeland. Samaria itself, rebuilt and 'repopulated more than before', was the destination for other deportees, with Sargon telling us that he 'brought into it people from countries conquered by my hands', then telling us that the first of these were Arab tribes relocated to Samaria in 715 BC. Others were brought in around 710/709 BC from Babylonia and from the Chaldaean and Aramaean tribes of the region.



ABOVE

This drawing of the Assyrian siege of the city of Gaza, based on a wall relief from Dur-Sharrukin, shows the Assyrian Army laying siege to the city. The composition is standard for the depiction of a siege. Two siege engines are seen employing large battering rams to break down the city wall. The large soldier is an auxiliary, his style of dress indicating that he comes from the Neo-Hittite kingdoms of northern Syria. This style draws heavily on that employed by the Urartian army. His shield is of wicker edged in leather or even metal. (Author's collection)

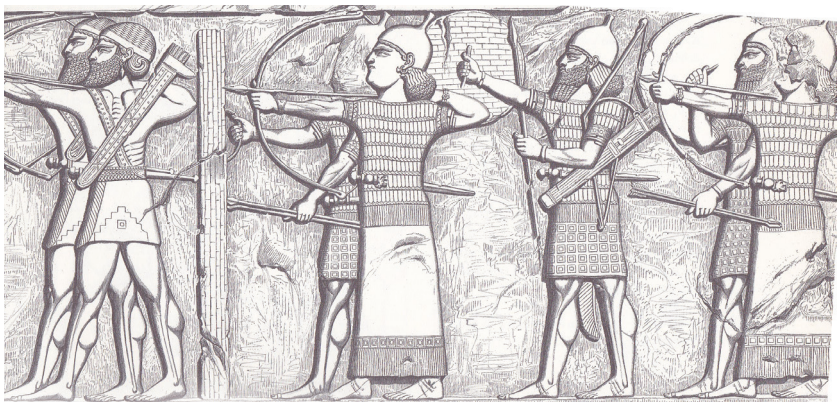
Thereafter, the now well exercised Assyrian Army and its king marched southwards to deal with the rebellious Philistine kingdoms of the southern Levant. These had repudiated the allegiances to Assyria that they had sworn to Tiglath-pileser III some 12 years before, and while there exists no documentary evidence that they were part of the Yau-bi'di coalition, that they failed to render tribute at this time suggests that they were. We know that Sargon was particularly interested in commercial matters. To that end the Phoenician and Philistine port cities of Ellishu, Simirra, Ahta, Sidon and Gaza became client states and had trading stations established within them to benefit Assyrian interests. In the south of the Levant the cities of Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron and Gaza were crucial in the continuing trade relations with Egypt and Arabia. These cities also served to function as a buffer zone between these two major powers.

Of these cities it was to Gaza that Sargon initially directed his attention. As the southernmost of these four cities, Gaza was not only the closest to Egypt, but it was the most important commercial centre of the region and connected to the north by the *via Maris* – the ancient coastal route along which so much of the trade moved northwards to the markets of the Near East, and especially Assyria. It was also situated just a few miles from Nahal Musri, a small river that functioned as the *de facto* border with Egypt. It was at Raphia (Rapihu), just to the south of Gaza, that the Assyrian Army met that of Gaza, which was supported by Egyptian troops dispatched by the pharaoh Osorkon IV. Sargon tells us the pharaoh had: 'ordered his general to go to his [Hanunu's] aid and do battle and fight against me. At the command of the god Ashur, my lord, I defeated them and Re'e [the general], like a shepherd whose flock had been stolen, ran off alone and disappeared. Hanunu I seized with my own hand and took him to my city, Ashur, in chains. The city of Rapihu I destroyed, I tore down, I burned with fire, 9033 people, together with their many possessions I carried off.'

Gaza was not annexed, as it was more valuable to Sargon as a client city-state. The other cities surrendered and came to terms, although in the case of Ekron, Sargon replaced its king with an appointee by the name of Padi. With their return fully into the Assyrian fold, a quiescent southern Levant was what the Assyrian monarch required. Egyptian interests were denied and goods, tribute and taxes would once again flow into Assyria. At the conclusion of this long but very fruitful season's campaigning, the army returned to Ashur.

Four years later, Sargon or one of his magnates – possibly the *turtanu* – led a military expedition back to the southern Levant not only as a military demonstration but to fulfil an explicitly commercial objective. That was to create an Assyrian-run trading emporium. Although Sargon was not present, he nonetheless relates in his Annals how the 'sealed' trading station was now unsealed by him – an oblique reference to that one which had been set up by Tiglath-pileser III some years before and which seems to have been abandoned, to which Egyptian and Arab merchants were encouraged to come and trade rather at Gaza.

Sargon was now fully able to realize what had been a commercial ambition of his since coming to the throne. With the whole of the Levantine coast now under Assyrian dominance down through Philistia to the Brook of Egypt, trade could flow without interruption to the greater benefit of the Assyrian state. This remained an issue of prime concern to later Assyrian kings. It was also the case that the highly prized goods and resources imported through the Phoenician ports was of such importance



ABOVE

A section of a relief drawn by Botta and Flandin taken from a wall relief at Dur-Sharrukin shows two ranks of archers firing on the walls of a city under siege. On the left are two auxiliary archers whilst behind them are troops of the *kisir sharruti*. Each archer is accompanied by a large shield bearer carrying a wicker shield. The two archers wearing the long kilts are both eunuchs and probably of higher rank than those who are protecting them. They all wear armoured lamellar corselets. Reign of Sargon II. (Author's collection)

to the Assyrian kings that although they chastised these city states, they did not annexe them, preferring to permit them to retain a nominal independence in order to ensure the continuing supply to Assyria of the fruits of their trade in overseas goods and other manufactured luxuries. The historian Sarah C. Melville says of this policy: 'The patron-client relationship allowed the Assyrians to reap the benefits of the maritime and overland trade without incurring the cost: the client did the work and the Assyrians got rich. Each emporium was run by an Assyrian official (*rab kari*) who kept an eye on the client, reported to the king, collected taxes and tolls, and, most important, controlled the flow of resources into and through the Assyrian provinces.'

An Arab chieftain was appointed to govern the trade and Sargon also opened diplomatic relations with Osorkon IV, Pharaoh of Egypt. Judah at this time remained a faithful vassal paying its tribute and would continue to do so until 704 BC.

Sargon's last involvement with Philistia occurred in 711 BC when the king of Ashdod by the name of Azuri decided to rebel, having had enough of paying tribute to the Assyrian king. This was hardly a sensible decision as he did so alone, although he was hoping for support from Egypt, which

alas for him was not forthcoming. It has been speculated that he was perhaps prompted to do so by a false rumour of the death of Sargon or that the Egyptians had deliberately sought to stir up trouble for Sargon by suggesting to Azuri that they would aid him. Whatever the cause of his rebellion, it was a fatal step. Sargon replaced the king with Ahimeti, his brother, a choice that was not to the liking of the city's inhabitants, who displaced him and put another in his stead. Interestingly, the man chosen was a Greek by the name of Iamani, a commoner. Iamani cast around for support, sending messages to all the surrounding kingdoms as far as Moab to the east of Judah, but he received no favourable responses. Egypt deemed its commercial ties with Sargon to be more important than coming to the aid of Ashdod. Iamani thus found himself isolated and facing the inevitable Assyrian military response. When it came it was not led by Sargon, but by his *turtanu,* whose name is unknown. Note of this event is to be found in Chapter 20 of the Book of Isaiah: 'The year the general-in-chief, sent by Sargon, came to Ashdod and stormed and captured it'.

In spite of the city's formidable defensive architecture, which consisted of very thick, high walls and a cleverly designed four-entry gate that made access for an attacker very difficult, the Assyrians, as Isaiah states, stormed and captured it. Excavations by archaeologists at the site of ancient Ashdod have located a mass grave housing the remains of some 3,000 victims that has been attributed to this assault. Subsidiary operations led to the taking of Ashdod's port, Ashdod-Yam on the Mediterranean coast, and also the city of Gath. Previously, Sargon had permitted the Philistinian cities to retain their independence but in the case of Ashdod, it was turned into a province following the deportation of its surviving citizens. Philistia and the southern Levant was quiescent for the rest of Sargon's reign.

THE NORTH-EAST AND NORTH-WEST

From 719 BC Sargon II was involved in campaigning in eastern Anatolia, the region of the Upper Euphrates as well as north-western Iran against the many city-states that acted as buffer states between Assyria and Urartu. The latter was fomenting problems among these peripheral small Neo-Hittite kingdoms that lay between the two regional powers, encouraging them to rebel against Sargon.

It was to eastern Anatolia that Sargon first turned in 718 BC, where he set out to ensure the security of the frontier that Tiglath-pileser III had secured in this region some years prior. The submission of Que and Tabal to Tiglath-pileser had unnerved the Phrygians, who saw the close proximity of Assyria's new frontier in the Taurus Mountains as a direct threat to their

own interests and security. In the years since, Midas I, king of Phrygia, had encouraged the kings of the small city-states that lay between them to challenge Assyrian power. Midas sought to avoid open conflict with Assyria but saw his own interests being served by these smaller states chafing at their relationship with the Mesopotamian power.

It was against one of the kings of Tabal who had been encouraged by Midas to rebel – the region itself was composed of several kingdoms – that Sargon first marched. This led to the destruction of the kingdom of Shinuhtu and its king. Midas was not, however, deterred, and he prompted Pisir, the king of Carchemish in Syria, to rebel against Assyria the following year. The city was captured and turned into a province, with its populace being deported to Assyria. It was only in 715 BC that Assyrian and Phrygian forces clashed when the latter were forced to vacate positions they had taken on the lower slopes of the Taurus Mountains. Neither Sargon nor Midas chose to see this as a *casus belli* for a wider conflict.

Nevertheless, this did not stop Midas allying to Urartu and generating further mischief for Assyria in Tabal. What was especially galling for Sargon was that one Ambaris of Bit-Burutash, one of the kingdoms that constituted Tabal, saw fit to throw in his lot with Urartu and Phrygia, as this king was a son-in-law of Sargon, being married to a daughter of the Assyrian monarch. Inevitably, this brought down the vengeance of the Assyrian monarch and in 713 BC a military expedition into Tabal saw Bit-Burutash defeated, with the king, his family and leading men deported to Assyria. Subsequently Sargon decided to translate the kingdom into a province.

This was not the last of the problems that Sargon had to deal with in this part of the world. In the northernmost extreme of Assyrian tributaries was the kingdom of Melid, which had by 712 BC been enticed into the Phrygian camp. Midas had to stand by as over two years between 712 and 711 BC Sargon reduced both Melid and its associated kingdom of Gurgum. Two years later Assyria began a major campaign against Phrygia to end once and for all its interference in Assyria's tributary holdings in Que and Tabal. At the same time Midas was attacked by the Cimmerians, who had come westwards after having defeated the Urartians in battle in 715 BC. Midas realized he could not face both, so sent peace overtures to Sargon. The Assyrian king was campaigning in Babylonia at the time but was nevertheless pleased to accept Midas' peace overtures, with the consequence that Phrygian interference in the Neo-Hittite states ceased. Urartian interference in the north-west of the empire also more or less ceased after 714 BC following Sargon's highly successful invasion of the kingdom.

THE NORTH AND NORTH-EAST

It was in the Zagros and north-western Iran – what could loosely be described as Assyria's north-eastern front – where the Assyrians found themselves involved on a regular basis with the machinations of Urartu in its attempt to wrest control of the buffer territories separating the two kingdoms. Of especial concern to both kingdoms was the region known as Mannaea, itself comprising several city-kingdoms. Farther to the east relative to both kingdoms was the territory of the Medes, who though occupying a large geographical area chose not to engage in territorial disputes with the other two powers.

What the Assyrians laid claim to in Mannaea at the start of Sargon's reign was far greater than the political reality on the ground, as many of the Mannaean kingdoms had been enticed into the Urartian sphere of influence. Thus, Sargon was only sure that Ellipi, Parsua and Namri lay firmly in the Assyrian camp, and it was clear that recovery of those other kingdoms now within the Urartian camp would entail some major military operations. In the words of his inscriptions: 'Ursa (Rusas), the Urartian, encouraged the men of Wishdish, Zikirtu and Misiandu, the great chiefs of the Manneans, to revolt and hostility… Ulusunnu, the Mannean, whom they placed on the throne of his father, put his trust in the Urartian Ursa and gave him two of his fortresses as a bribe. In the anger of my heart I mustered the masses of Ashur's troops and, raging like a lion, I set my face to conquer those lands.'

No sooner had the Assyrian Army begun its campaign in the north-east than it had to be ended, as Sargon deemed dealing with events in Que and Tabal as being more important. It was was only three years later in 716 BC that he turned to deal with the problem in the north-east, leading a campaign into the Zagros mountains to deal with the ongoing problem of Mannaea.

Two years later in 714 BC, Assyria dealt a crippling defeat to Urartu such that it marked the beginning of the decline of the Armenian power, while the kingdoms that had defected had returned to the Assyrian camp. The substance of this campaign – one of the best attested in Assyrian inscriptions, in this case in the form of a detailed letter to the god Ashur – is dealt with in the section of the Assyrian Army at war as an exemplar of a major Assyrian campaign. Two new provinces were created – Kar-Nergal and Kar-Sharrukin – and Sargon also seized territory from the Medes and received tribute from numerous Median tribal chiefs. With Mannaea firmly under the Assyrian thumb, and with many Median chiefs committed to the delivery of annual tribute, Sargon had by these campaigns assured himself of the horse supply so vital to the Assyrian Army. However, Assyrian success did not mean the cessation of problems in this part of the empire, as in 713 BC the army needed to deal with problems in Ellipi and Karalla. Sargon also received tribute from no fewer

than 45 Median city-lords. Whilst this frontier was rarely quiescent, after 714 BC Urartu played no real part in any of the events.

RETURN TO BABYLONIA

It took Sargon no fewer than ten years of hard campaigning across the breadth of the empire before the last flames of rebellion that had ignited with his accession were finally suppressed. This at last permitted him to turn his attention to the south of Assyria and settle matters in Babylonia. In the years since his initial foray against the border city of Der, ten years before, the throne of Babylon had been occupied by the Chaldaean tribal leader Merodach-baladan, the head of the tribe of Bit-Yakin. Despite the hiatus in the Assyrian monarch's operations in the southern kingdom, this had in no way diminished Sargon's perception of the importance of Babylon, as the city was seen as the 'most precious and prestigious possession of the empire'. Thus the decade-long interval in Assyrian concern for its oversight had been a consequence of necessity, not one of choice. So it was that in 710 BC the Assyrian Army was made ready for a major offensive to take back the region and its capital, in what would transpire to be a three-year campaign lasting through to 707 BC. Nor can there be any doubt of Sargon's animus towards the Babylonian king. His expressed views of Merodach-baladan were venomous and vitriolic. And there is more than a whiff of a personal grudge on Sargon's part towards this Chaldaean upstart who had usurped Babylon's throne and had occupied it for the previous ten years. According to Sargon he was: 'the seed of a murderer, prop of a wicked devil, who did not fear the name of the lord of lords… violated the oaths of the great gods and withheld his gifts… the treacherous enemy!' and one who 'exercised the kingship over Babylon against the will of the gods'.

Sargon did not originally target Babylon proper, but rather sought to prevent any intervention by Elam, so chose to advance his army, as had Tiglath-pileser III, along the eastern bank of the Tigris. Sargon ordered a muster of his army at Nimrud and possibly chose to draw on his forces from the province of Zamua, which may have joined the main army as it marched south. It advanced at a rapid pace by way of the city of Dur-Athara which had been fortified by the Babylonian king, but these improved defences were to no avail. The city was stormed and was taken quickly. Sargon renamed it Dur-Nabu and annexed it, with it becoming the main city of a new province called Gambulu. Remaining at Dur-Nabu, Sargon then sent his army southwards as far as the river Karkheh, thereby driving a wedge between Babylon and any

ABOVE

Sargon's greatest campaign was his invasion of Urartu in 714 BC. The cavalry he took with him played the major role in bringing about the defeat of the Urartian army and its vassals at the battle of Mount Waus. By this date Assyrian cavalry had yet to be equipped with armour. They were armed both with a long lance and with the bow. They are now also equipped with the Assyrian laced boot. This would have been the appearance of the 1,000-man cavalry escort for the king under the command of his brother, Sin-ahu-usur.
(Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)

possibility of reinforcement from Elam. Indeed, the passivity of Shutruk-nahunte, the King of Elam, in the face of these Assyrian provocations convinced Sargon that the Elamites would make no move to counter the Assyrian campaign. With his eastern flank secured, Sargon then crossed the Tigris and moved his army into Babylonia.

Sargon made for Babylon itself but only after being assured through his intelligence sources that Merodach-baladan had left the city and that his entry would be supported by groups within the populace such as the priesthoods of the great temples, the nobility, artisans and the ordinary people. This opposition to Merodach-baladan was also prominent in other important Babylonian cities such as Borsippa, Sippar and Nippur. It was claimed by the opposition that the god Marduk had ordered the son of Yakin (Merodach-baladan) out of Babylon and had in his place favoured Sargon, and the most important priests of the temples in Babylon and Borsippa extended an invitation for Sargon to enter the city. It was only when he received this news that Sargon decided to do so. To crown his achievement Sargon 'grasped' the hand of Marduk in the Akitu or New Year Festival, thus confirming his legitimacy as King of Babylon. It was while Sargon was in Babylon that an unusual event occurred, with even the king's inscriptions communicating this:

> And seven kings of Ia', a district of Iatnana (Cyprus) whose distant abodes are situated seven days' journey in the sea of the setting sun, and the name of whose land, since the far-off days of the moon-god's time, not one of the kings, my fathers who ruled Assyria and Babylonia, had heard, these kings heard from afar, in the midst of the sea, of the deeds

> I was performing in Chaldaea and the Hittite-land, their hearts were rent, fear fell upon them, gold, silver, furniture of maple and boxwood, of the workmanship of their land they brought before me in Babylon, and they kissed my feet.

That this delegation from Cyprus felt the need to visit Sargon in faraway Babylon and volunteer their submission is testimony to the fear that this conqueror had generated even across the sea. Sargon had a stele erected on the island in the settlement of Kition (Larnaca). It was also while he was in Babylon that Sargon received a delegation sent by Midas of Phrygia, who was now beginning to the feel the pressure of the Cimmerians coming from the east and requested a peace treaty with Assyria that Sargon was most pleased to accept, and which was recorded in the Annals with Midas 'offering to do feudal service and to pay tribute'. A quiescent north-western frontier was clearly both to Sargon's advantage and also left Midas to concentrate on the Cimmerian threat.

Sargon chose not to stay in Babylon and instead repaired to Kish, where the Assyrian Army was now based, in order to prepare for the campaign that would occupy the year 709/708 BC. Although the bulk of northern Babylonia was now in Assyrian hands, Merodach-baladan had retreated into the Sealand and had started a programme to fortify the city of Dur-Yakin in anticipation of the Assyrians coming and laying siege to the city. He had not written off his chances of recovering Babylon and the throne and was attempting to recruit troops from among sympathetic Aramaean and Chaldaean tribes. He surrounded the city with a deep moat dug to a depth of about 'one and a half ninden' – about 30 feet – the depth of the water table. He also had a channel dug from the Euphrates and used the water to flood the surrounding flood plain with a view to making it problematic for the Assyrians to properly deploy their cavalry and chariots. As for Merodach-baladan, he together with his auxiliary troops and battle troops set his lordly tent 'in the midst of the waters like pelicans' and deployed his troops

OPPOSITE

This scene shows a campaign in Babylonia, but is emblematic of the Assyrian Army way of war. In the centre of the relief two scribes are taking notes – one on paper/leather in ink and in Aramaic, while the other uses a wax foldable writing board to do so in cuneiform. They are recording the number of heads each Assyrian warrior has taken in battle. An officer places a bracelet around the wrist of the soldier in front of him by way of reward for those he has taken. Whereas Assyrians took heads as trophies, the Egyptians took hands and the Hebrews foreskins. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

in front of the main city gates 'among the rivers'. The Assyrians however were in no way intimidated by these Chaldaean defensive moves. Their engineers had earthen ramps built to permit access to the ground around the city, where they engaged the Chaldaeans. The latter fought to hold off the Assyrians, giving enough time for their leader to escape from the city, then retreated into it. It would seem the Chaldaean troops gave as good as they got, for once they had retreated within with the gates shut, the Assyrians could not gain entry and thus settled down to lay siege to Dur-Yakin.

Notwithstanding the conflicting accounts of how the city fell – with Sargon even claiming that he generously let Merodach-baladan go free in exchange for the surrender of the city and its great booty – the Chaldaean leader and ex-king of Babylon did escape to take refuge in Elam, where he died in the reign of Sennacherib. However, even the Assyrian Eponym Chronicle implies that the siege lasted perhaps a year, as it is only in 707 BC that it reports that the city walls of Dur-Yakin were pulled down and the booty transported to Assyria. The people of Yakin were deported to Kummuhu, a city-state that had rebelled in 708 BC with its people being sent en masse to southern Babylonia and the territory of Yakin.

By that date Babylonia was in Assyrian hands. The historian Sarah C. Melville noted the following – an observation that has implications for our understanding of events in the reign of Sargon's son in Judah in 701 BC, but in reality a maxim that applied to all Assyrian military operations: 'Deliberate economy of force in Babylonia allowed Sargon to achieve his objectives there while maintaining a hold on the rest of his empire. *Knowing that his army was a limited resource that required careful husbandry* [author's italics], Sargon spent nearly as much effort keeping up the appearance of military invincibility as he did maintain actual military effectiveness'.

Sargon remained in Babylon until 707 BC, overseeing the efforts to reconcile the Babylonian populace to their new master. The testimony to their success lies in the willingness of the people of Babylon to acknowledge the Assyrian monarch as their ruler also. Certainly for many the rule of Sargon was infinitely preferable to that of the Chaldaean Merodach-baladan.

THE FINAL YEARS

Sargon's triumphant return to Assyria was followed by the investiture of his new capital city, Dur-Sharrukin, on the sixth day of Ayyaru in 706 BC. It has been speculated that Sargon's reasons for building a new capital had to do with his desire to be free of the older nobility who may still have viewed him, notwithstanding his great success as a military leader and king, as a parvenu and usurper. Nonetheless, the building programme that

created Dur-Sharrukin had been ongoing for some years and had been the venue for many of the deported peoples. Interestingly, this description is given in the third person: 'At that time with the labour of the enemy peoples which his hands had conquered, which Ashur, Nab and Marduk his tutelary divinities had given him as a gift, and at the command of the god, at the foot of Mount Musri, above Nineveh, he built a city, following the prompting of his heart, and called it Dur-Sharrukin'.

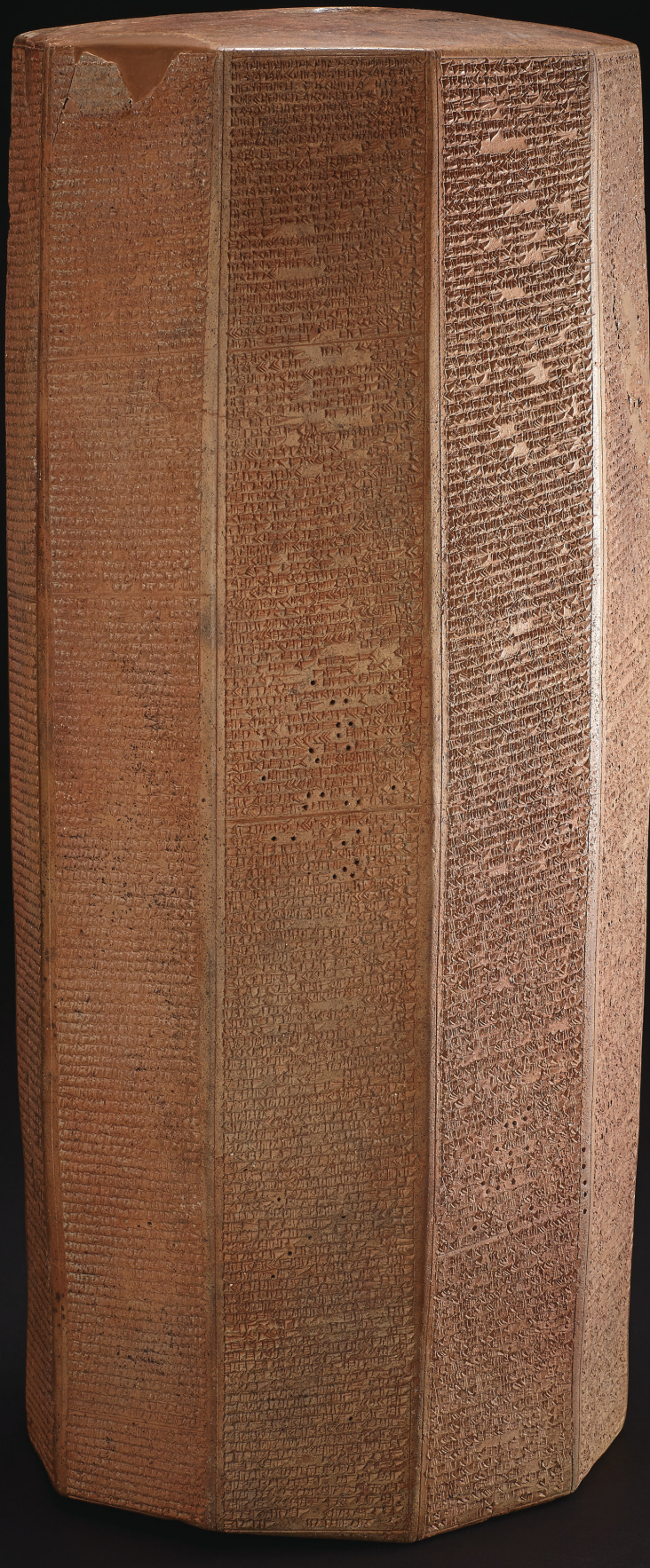
By the time of its completion it was one of the largest cities in the world, and according to Sargon was very much designed according to his wishes. The long high walls, punctuated by many towers, were over 65 feet high and enclosed an area of some 1.2 square miles. Set into the walls were eight gates all named after gods. Within was the huge new palace of the king, a new *ekal masharti,* a ziggurat and temples to the gods, and palaces – including one for his brother Sin-ahu-usur. Sargon was especially proud of the 'park like Mount Amanus, in which there were set out every tree of the Hittite-land, the plants (fruit trees) of every mountain, I laid out by its side'.

Conscious of the majesty of his new creation, Sargon saw it as properly fitting that he celebrate the completion of this great project and 'invited' to visit Dur-Sharrukin for its investiture 'the princes of the four regions of the world, the governors of my land, the nobles, officials and elders of Assyria I took up my abode in my palace and I prepared a feast.' And at the end of this passage Sargon petitions the god Ashur: 'For me, Sargon, who dwells in that palace, may he decree as my destiny, life until distant days'.

Alas for the king, for his desire for a long life was not to be granted. In the following year, 705 BC, he mustered his army in Dur-Sharrukin and led it westwards into the north-west, treading once more the oft-taken road to Tabal to put down a rebellion in Kulummu – a place whose exact location is unknown to archaeologists – led by one Gurdi, one of the many rulers in the Tabal region. What exactly happened is uncertain save for its outcome. The Assyrian Army was defeated by the Kulummaens and Sargon was killed.

Official accounts detailing the event have little of detail to say, although the Assyrian Eponym Chronicle stated the following: 'in the eponymy of Nashur-Bel (705 BC) the king marched against Gurdi; the king was killed; the camp of the King of Assyria was plundered and on the 12th of Ab (late July), Sennacherib became king.'

So died a monarch who spent most of his reign at war. Although the Assyrian Empire had yet to reach its geographical limit at the time of his death, Sargon nonetheless ruled the largest empire the Ancient World had seen up until to that time. It would be left to his descendants – those of the House of Sargon – to realize that.



CHAPTER FIVE

SENNACHERIB, 704–681 BC

In a culture in which nothing happened in life without it being explicable in terms of the will of the gods, the death of Sargon II in battle was a profoundly traumatic and unprecedented event for the nobility and the priesthood of Assyria. Compounding the matter was the lack of the dead king's body so that the normal ritual of the interring of the deceased monarch in Ashur could not proceed, as had been the tradition, prior to the crowning of the new. Even so, the succession proceeded smoothly with the long-serving crown prince, Sennacherib, ascending the throne on the 12th day of Abu in 704 BC. Unlike Sargon, who had had to fight for the throne, Sennacherib's passage was uncontested. He had, after all, been the designated successor of Sargon for many years, and tells us: 'I solemnly took my seat on the throne and took command of the population of Assyria amid obedience and peace.'

But it is no question, however, that he did so under a cloud. The fact that the normal ritual for a new king could not be followed was deemed by the priesthood to be highly inauspicious. There was a plethora of beliefs in the cultures of the Ancient Near East concerning the burial of the dead that stretched back to the very earliest times. The *Epic of Gilgamesh*, one of the

OPPOSITE

The prism of baked clay on which the campaigns of Sennacherib were recorded in cuneiform. It details the Assyrian campaign against the kingdom of Judah in 701 BC, launched as punishment by the Assyrian king following King Hezekiah's failure to pay tribute from 704 BC.
(© The Trustees of the British Museum)

great and earliest literary texts, has the eponymous hero in discussion with the ghost of his dead friend Enkidu. Gilgamesh asks of him: 'Did you see the one who was killed in battle?… Did you see the one whose corpse was thrown into the steppe?' Enkidu responded 'I saw. His ghost does not find rest in the underworld.'

Such, it was presumed, would be the fate of the ghost of Sargon. Even in the words of the prophet Isaiah Ch 14 vs 16–19, when speaking of the demise of this Assyrian king it is possible to find a resonance of this notion:

> When they see you, they will scrutinize you
> And consider what you have become,
> 'Is this the man who made the world tremble?
> Who overthrew kingdoms?
> He made the world a desert,
> He levelled cities
> And never freed his prisoners to go to their home.'
> All other kings of nations, all of them,
> lie honourably, each in his own tomb;
> but you have been thrown away, unburied
> like a loathsome branch,
> covered with the heaps of the slain pierced by the sword
> who fall on the rocks of the abyss
> like trampled carrion.

Both the new king and the priesthood were of the view that Sargon must have committed a very grievous sin to so offend the gods that they should have secured his demise in this fashion. In order not to be tainted by links with his father, Sennacherib ordered that Sargon's still very new capital at Dur-Sharrukin (Khorsabad) be abandoned as being cursed and had the court removed to Nineveh, which became the new capital of the empire. Nor did he ever refer to him by name thereafter.

SUPPRESSING THE TIDE OF REBELLION

As soon as the news of Sargon's infamous demise spread within the empire, a succession of rebellions broke out. Thus, at the very outset of his reign, Sennacherib was faced with the need to suppress these, with their number and the geographical range of their occurrence determining that the first years of his reign would necessarily be engaged in extensive and wide-ranging military campaigning from Philistia, Judah and Egypt in the south-west through to Babylonia. These were priority campaigns,

as it was imperative that the Assyrian state be seen to stamp out revolt anywhere in the empire.

But the new king had little experience of warfare. In the 15 years of his reign, Sargon had never taken his son and crown prince along on his many military expeditions. Rather, he was left at home to oversee Assyria in the king's stead and be responsible for the military intelligence, for which we have ample cuneiform evidence. It has been suggested that he possibly felt himself overshadowed by his father's fame as a warlord. It would seem that Sennacherib's own proclivities lay elsewhere, and despite his well-known military exploits once king, he was not primarily a warlord. It appears his real interests lay elsewhere. Having become king, he was perforce catapulted into the role of military leader and seemed determined to carve out a reputation for himself as such. However, it is very likely that he was most proud of the more pacific achievements of his reign, in particular the creation of his new palace 'without rival' as part of his rebuilding of the city of Nineveh to become the greatest city in the world by the time of his death in 681 BC.

Nonetheless, we see a number of policy departures from those of Sargon in the manner in which Sennacherib ruled. Despite the normative exhortations at his coronation to expand 'his lands', the new king, although heavily militarily engaged throughout his reign, did not expand the borders of the empire to encompass new territories to come under the 'sway of Ashur'. Neither did he share his predecessor's enthusiasm for the southern kingdom of Babylonia. Whilst observing the traditional respect for its culture, he never embraced Sargon's seeming piety for its gods perhaps at the expense of Assyria's own – a matter in which he might have seen the origin of his father's 'great sin'.

THE MILITARY CAMPAIGNS

Within a very short time of his accession Sennacherib had dispatched an army against the Kulummeans, who had been responsible for the death of Sargon. On this occasion it was led by a number of the magnates – it probably being thought not prudent for the king to go. That this campaign did not figure in the king's later Annals implies that it was not a success.

The first officially recorded campaign was directed southwards into Babylonia. This kingdom was to become the most problematic dealing of Sennacherib's reign, for by this date there is no question that Babylon was deemed to be the most important concern of Assyrian foreign policy.

In 703 BC that *bête noire* of the Assyrians Merodach-baladan re-emerged from his exile in Elam, where he had been forced by the campaigning of Sargon II, and he seized the throne of Babylon the following year. In this he was supported by the Chaldaean tribes and aided by the Elamites whom he

OPPOSITE

Sennacherib sitting on a throne overlooking the siege of Lachish. To the right one of his magnates is pointing to a particular part of the action, whilst in the foreground two senior Army officers, each carrying a decorated mace as a symbol of their rank, also look on. Two eunuchs use large fans to keep the flies away from ths monarch. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)

had bribed to lend him their support. The latter power would now become an almost constant aide of the rebellious forces within Babylon, and whenever the Assyrian Army moved into Babylon, they would find themselves opposed not only by the native Aramaean and Chaldaean tribes but also the armies of Elam. This power could field large and effective military forces and they succeeded on a number of occasions in besting the Assyrian Army in open field battles. This meant that whenever Assyrian monarchs led military expeditions into Babylonia, the forces they took were large, and it is no exaggeration to say that the ongoing campaigns there did much to degrade the Assyrian Army in the way of manpower and treasure over the longer term.

This first official campaign of the reign was directed into the southern kingdom and began late in 703 BC. According to Sennacherib, upon hearing of Merodach-baladan's rebellion and takeover of Babylon, he 'raged up like a lion and ordered the march to Babylon to confront him'. From the army that left Ashur he dispatched a formation under his magnates that was charged with engaging the enemy forces deployed in and around Kish, whilst the bulk of the army advanced on the city of Cutha, where it engaged another Babylonian force. This was defeated and the bulk of the army turned to assist the force that had been sent to the Plain of Kish where it was under pressure. In the battle that followed the Babylonian forces were defeated and Merodach-baladan escaped, abandoning Babylon and retreating into the swamps of the Sealand. In short order, Sennacherib and his army occupied Babylon which, apart from the place being plundered, was left in good order. He placed on the throne a certain Bel-ibni, who he tells us had been raised at the court of Assyria like 'a young puppy'. With this new puppet king ensconced on the throne, he moved southwards into the Sealand in a bid to hunt down the Chaldaean leader. This was ultimately unsuccessful as the wily Chaldaean escaped the Assyrian king's clutches, and he had to settle for second best, prosecuting a short, but systematic campaign to root out and destroy all opponents in the other major cities of the kingdom. According to the Annals he rounded up 208,000 persons for deportation to Assyria along with a multiplicity of animals – 7,200 horses and mules, 1,073 donkeys, 5,230 camels, 80,050 oxen and 800,100 sheep. If the figure of 208,000 persons is accurate, it constituted the

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largest single episode of deportation that the Assyrians ever undertook. With the end of this aspect of the campaign, the operation in Babylonia was terminated and the Assyrian Army returned to the homeland. It would be two years before Sennacherib returned to attend to the problematic southern kingdom.

The following year, in 702 BC, he led his second campaign, into the Zagros Mountains to re-establish Assyrian authority and assure control over them. In the meantime, preparations were begun for the next campaign, which would see the Assyrian Army advance to the Egyptian border and in the process deal with those kingdoms in the west that had rebelled when news of the death of Sargon had reached them. Following in the footsteps of Tiglath-pileser III and his father, Sargon II, who had both undertaken this march and in the case of the former had created the power structures that obtained on the Egyptian frontier, required a major logistic effort given the distance of 1,650 miles to be traversed. Nor was there any illusion about the nature of the operation. Intelligence suggested that those Philistine cities that had revolted had been pressurized into doing so by Hezekiah, king of Judah. Behind him, however, was detected the hand of the Egyptians. Indeed, one senses a particular dislike in the manner that Sennacherib speaks of Hezekiah – a presumption that it was he who was behind the rebellion in the southern Levant.

It is uncertain where the muster points for this operation were, but they would have been sufficiently close to the coming theatre of operations that the army could reach the first of its designated objectives – in this case the city of Sidon – quickly and without wearing itself out in a long approach march. Even before the Assyrian Army had reached the coastal city, Luli, its king, had abandoned it and fled to Cyprus. Sennacherib did not state why he did this, but it is a reasonable inference that either he had rebelled by not making his tribute payments or that he was known to have been sympathetic to those that had. He installed a new king – one Tuba'lu – in his stead, and imposed upon him the tribute to be paid for the future. The local region, which also included the other cities of Tyre and Acco, was quick to make its submission, as did many other kings, who journeyed to Ushu, an outlier of Sidon, to make theirs. Included in the list were those of Arwad, Ashdod, Byblos and Samsimuruna and, from farther afield in the Trans-Jordan, those of Ammon, Edom and Moab. The historian W. Mayer is of the opinion that most brought with them their auxiliary troops, which would have been called for in the summons issued from Nineveh prior to the start of the campaign. This he inferred by virtue of Sennacherib's mention of their use as labour in building the later siege ramp at Azekah (and probably at Lachish also).

Missing from this assembly of tributaries were the kings of Judah, Ashkelon and Ekron. Padi, the ruler of the latter city-state, was at that time a resident in the dungeon of the palace of Hezekiah, the king of Judah, in Jerusalem. He had been displaced from his throne by the leaders of his city because of his continuing loyalty to Assyria and had refused to join the rebellion. Handed over by them to Hezekiah, his release would figure in exchanges with Sennacherib.

It must be assumed, as no fighting had occurred at Sidon or thereafter, that when the Assyrian Army broke camp and moved southwards, this interval wherein the bulk of the kingdoms in the south-west had once again declared their loyalty to Assyria had not occupied much time. Certainly, a rapid solution to the problems of this region was desired by the Assyrian monarch and the military preparations undertaken to deal with those still recalcitrant rebels had been directed to that end. Of the cities of Philistia, just two had openly rebelled, namely Ashkelon and Ekron. The former was dealt with first, although in the process of advancing on the city, the Assyrians dealt initially with a number of cities under the aegis of Sidqa, the king of Ashkelon. These were 'surrounded, conquered and plundered' as they had not submitted, but as to how Ashkelon fell we have no account. Sidqa is recounted as being in the hands of the king of Assyria and he, his family and household gods deported to Assyria. Sennacherib tells us that he 'set Sharru-lu-dari, son of Rukibtu, their former king, over the people of the city of Ashkelon, and imposed upon him the tribute and gifts in recognition of my overlordship so that he now pulls my yoke'.

The chronology is uncertain, but some time in the course of operations in the south the Assyrian Army came into open conflict with a force of Egyptian troops whose support had been requested by the leaders of Ekron. Sennacherib tells us that this force, comprising chariots and archers, was met and defeated at a place called Eltekeh in the only open field battle of this campaign. How large this contingent or army was and who led it has also been the subject of much academic speculation over the years, and is still ongoing. However, this intervention was not taken as a *casus belli* by Sennacherib. He had no desire for a war with Egypt; nor, it would seem, had Egypt with Assyria. Suffice it to say, it did not seem to impact on the progress of Assyrian arms. The cities of Eltekeh and Timnah, in close proximity to one another, were both conquered and sacked.

In the wake of the battle of Eltekeh, the Assyrians moved against Ekron, but here Sennacherib wished to demonstrate that he could be merciful as well as vengeful. Whatever the means, the city opened its gates to the Assyrians, and, rather than destroying it, he dealt harshly only with

those of its leaders who had handed over their king to Hezekiah of Judah. Their bodies he had hung on the towers around the city. Those of its citizens who had supported them he had deported. The remainder he left. Sennacherib also states that at this time he reinstated Padi as king, saying he 'had brought him out of Jerusalem', though it seems unlikely that this occurred before his campaign in Judah.

With the problems of Philistia disposed of, he now turned to what was in all probability the primary task of the whole south-western expedition – the reduction of Judah. In the light of the importance of the campaign into Judah in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the coverage of the events of Sennacherib's campaign against Judah has been addressed in greater length. However, the account, drawing on Assyrian sources, suggests a very different outcome than that in the Bible.

INTO JUDAH

Perhaps no event in Old Testament history, apart from the Exodus, has generated as much debate as has Sennacherib's campaign of 701 BC in Judah. Varying accounts – varying inasmuch as they differ in emphasis and indeed content – are to be found in the books of 2 Kings, Isaiah and Chronicles of the Jewish Tanakh and the Christian Old Testament. A purported account is also to be found in Herodotus' *Histories*. To set alongside these are the details found in the Annals of Sennacherib. Their presentation of how matters unfolded in 701 BC is very different from those in the Jewish religious texts – hence the fascination for modern scholars, who continue to expend much air and paper in discussion about what they think occurred. The treatment here is necessarily spare but sufficient to offer up a different view to that found in the biblical material, which yet takes account of the evidence.

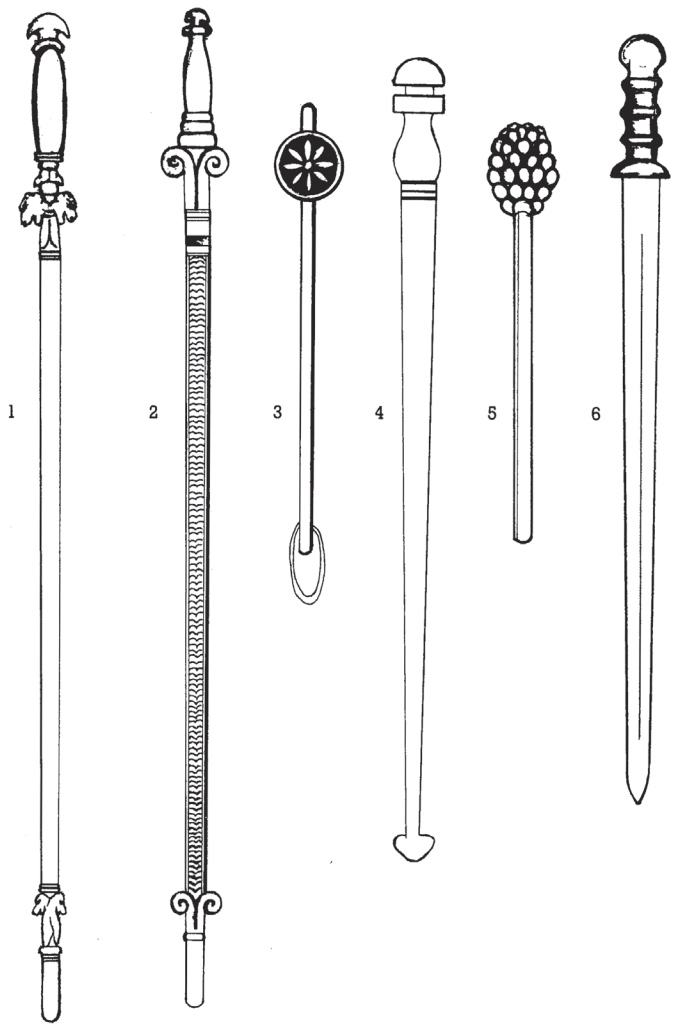
The Assyriologist Eckart Frahm articulates what is clearly the most problematic aspect of the whole Judaen episode, that is: 'how to reconcile Sennacherib's account of the campaign – which presents it as a great success – and the rather different Biblical ones, with their insistence that Sennacherib suffered a debilitating defeat in Jerusalem'. He goes on to express the view that: 'All in all, there is now a widespread consensus that the Biblical authors, driven by theological concerns, actually paint a rather distorted picture of the outcome of the campaign, despite the fact that they report several details accurately'.

Not the least of these 'distortions' is that, contrary to the biblical accounts, Jerusalem was never put under siege. Under blockade, yes. But not siege. The difference is significant given how axiomatic the notion of Jerusalem being besieged by the Assyrian Army is to the whole theological presentation

of Sennacherib's campaign, which is portrayed as a disaster brought about by the miraculous intervention of the God of the Jews. It is this matter that will need to be examined more closely.

The first observation to make is that we cannot understand how the campaign in Judah unfolded unless we recognize that Sennacherib was governed from the outset by a strategy established by Tiglath-pileser III over this same region some 33 years before. This had seen the city-states of Philistia and Judah being regarded by him as 'buffer states' under Assyrian suzerainty as part of his wider strategy for the southern Levant, with their purpose being to act as a glacis to block possible Egyptian expansion into this region. This policy was subsequently embraced by Sargon II as being the backdrop to his own dealings with Philistia – even after Ashdod had rebelled and been suppressed in 711 BC – and was then continued by his son, Sennacherib.

Neither monarch had seen the need to change the rationale underpinning this policy. It is this that accounts for why Sennacherib's purpose in unleashing his army against Judah in 701 BC was not to destroy that state. Nor should it be forgotten that he certainly possessed the resources to do so, had that been his real intention. The Assyrian Army was as capable of doing to Judah in 701 BC what Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian Army did to the Jewish state in 586 BC – that is, totally destroy it – and that included taking Jerusalem. Rather, the purpose of Assyrian action, drastic though it was, was punitive in nature and limited in its intended outcome. Sennacherib wished to visit severe punishment on Hezekiah by economically devastating much of his kingdom and deporting a large number of its population. Thereafter Judah, suitably chastised, would continue to fulfil its assigned role within the framework of Assyrian strategy for the southern Levant as a buffer state, albeit now very much weaker. This also accounts for why Assyria did not turn the kingdoms of Philistia and Judah into provinces – again often invoked by those arguing the case for an Assyrian siege of Jerusalem as an Assyrian defeat – as it was perceived by the Assyrians that had they done so, then the Egyptians would have felt profoundly threatened by the presence of Assyrian military forces in such provinces and would have probably reacted accordingly. Although Sennacherib's son Esarhaddon would subsequently invade Egypt, this was not something that it is thought his father had any intention of doing, nor had he any desire to go to war with Egypt – and this even after the battle of Eltekeh. A quiescent border in the southern Levant was required. Unless this is grasped, it will not be understood why, contrary to the biblical redrawing of the event, there was actually no Assyrian siege of Jerusalem. Nor does this author believe it was ever Sennacherib's intention to subject Judah's capital to one. Punishment, not extirpation, was the Assyrian king's strategy.



ABOVE

The wall reliefs covering the Neo-Assyrian period include a multiplicity of sword types and maces. The latter were carried by officers as a symbol of their rank. Those of the 9th century were more ornate than those of the 6th century, by which time mass production in the various *ekal masharti* arsenals led to simpler and more functional designs. (1) Sword carried by Ashurnasirpal II, 9th century; (2) sword carried by cavalry trooper, 9th century; (3) officer's mace, 9th century; (4) infantry sword, reign of Tiglath-pileser III, 7th century; (5) officer's mace, king's bodyguard, reign of Sennacherib, late 7th century; (6) infantry sword, 6th century. These have been drawn by the author from weapons seen on the wall reliefs. (Author's collection)

HEZEKIAH'S REBELLION

Judah became an Assyrian vassal in 734 BC, when, as we have seen, the army of Tiglath-pileser III reached the border with Egypt. Thereafter, Judah remained a loyal vassal, paying its annual tribute until 705/704 BC when Hezekiah signified his rebellion against Assyria by no longer doing so. As with all Assyrian vassals, the tribute levied was onerous and the desire to be free of the link to the northern Mesopotamian superpower was probably very strong and ever-present. But for many states the maintenance of tribute payments was deemed to be a necessary burden. The alternative, namely the consequences that would inevitably follow by failing to pay the said tribute, was to face the vengeance of the Assyrian king and the very likelihood of national extinction at the hands of his army. This was deemed by many rulers as too great a risk to undertake. So why then did Hezekiah, in the year 705/704 BC, decide to do exactly that?

The catalyst was undoubtedly the news of the death of Sargon II in battle. This was an unprecedented event and one it was presumed in Jerusalem was bound to throw Assyria and its new king into confusion and uncertainty. Out of that perceived and clearly imagined weakness and wishful thinking stemmed Hezekiah's gamble to raise the Judaean flag of rebellion. In the Second Book of Kings Ch18 vs 7 we find a somewhat laconic account of this matter: 'He rebelled against the King of Assyria and would not serve him.' Furthermore, Hezekiah had been in communication with the Nubian rulers of Egypt and had been bolstered by the intimations of help that would be coming to Judah's assistance from that quarter. As Hezekiah perceived matters, there could hardly be a more propitious time in which to make his bid for Judah's independence.

Hezekiah and his advisers were at least realistic about the inevitability of an Assyrian invasion of Judah. Such was the huge differential in military power between the two combatants that the notion of engaging the Assyrian Army in open battle was a pipe dream. Rather, Hezekiah took extensive steps to fortify as many of his main cities and other settlements as possible by expanding their defences and by building up extensive supplies within them to sustain their populations once the Assyrian Army arrived. Any intention of denying the Assyrians was at best a forlorn hope. But there again, it is clear that the king and the population were also counting on more than thick defensive walls to protect them. Divine aid was hoped for to help them in their time of misery. It was only by these means that there existed any hope at all of frustrating Assyrian intentions. Such, however, was not apparent once the Assyrian Army began its campaign of reducing the Judaean cities and settlements, and in this matter they were tenacious.

Although it took until 701 BC for Sennacherib to finally move against Judah, when he did, this particular aspect of the wider campaign of that year

had all the hallmarks of having been carefully prepared for. Stage one of the campaign must have taken a minimum of two or three months to execute, leaving a limited time available from the campaigning season to deal with Judah. The Assyrians were to be aided in this by the fact that the kingdom of Judah was relatively small, as were the distances between its major settlements. Notwithstanding the extensive steps that Hezekiah had taken to prepare his kingdom for the inevitable Assyrian response when it came, the speed with which the Assyrian Army moved through Judah was remarkable, and the destruction they wreaked totally devastating.

Sennacherib had set up his base of operations overlooking the fortress city of Lachish, with a sizeable force being retained in its vicinity to conduct a siege of it (a detailed treatment is included on pp. 294–310 and it is referred to only in passing here). That the Assyrian king did this at Lachish rather than at Jerusalem and at the very outset of his campaign in Judah suggests that a siege of its capital was never intended or even planned for. If the Assyrian intention had been to actually lay siege to Jerusalem, which would in all probability have been the case had the intention been to utterly destroy Judah, then the reasonable assumption would be that the Assyrian monarch would have established his base of operations there, and not at Lachish, which would then have been reduced to just another of the 'fortified cities' spoken of in the Annals and would never have garnered the extensive coverage in the wall reliefs that it did.

The rest of the Assyrian Army committed to this operation moved inland, in all probability organized into self-sustaining 'task forces' equipped with all the necessary equipment to execute the specific tasks they had been allocated and begin the task of reducing Judaean opposition and execute the planned systematic destruction and pillage of its cities and countryside. Another, lesser force was sent to invest Jerusalem, the reason being that this was seen as a secondary operation.

OPPOSITE

A section of one of the large panels that makes up the frieze of the wall reliefs illustrating the siege of Lachish. This particular scene shows Sennacherib sitting on his throne facing the city of Lachish. In front of him stands a magnate with three senior officers to his rear. That they are officers is indicated by the maces they carry. The face of the king has been quite deliberately mutilated. This probably occurred in 612 BC when Babylonian and Median troops sacked the city. It was probably carried out by a soldier of the former who took his revenge on the image of the Assyrian king who had destroyed Babylon in 689 BC. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

OPPOSITE

Most of the wall reliefs brought back by Layard to the British Museum from Room XXXVI (the Lachish Room) of Sennacherib's Palace in Nineveh have been reconstructed in the museum to show how they would have looked when in situ. This illustrates how the reliefs were arranged to take account of one of the corners of the room in the palace. The previous image of Sennacherib on his portable throne was situated on the relief on the left of the image. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Nor would the Assyrians have embarked on such a destructive campaign in a haphazard fashion. The Assyrian Army was systematic in the manner whereby it conducted such operations, with the destruction of the 46 Judaean cities having all the hallmarks of a highly organized programme of planned economic destruction. Nor were the other settlements – ranging in size from small towns to the many villages that must have dotted the Judaean countryside – spared. In modern parlance, what took place is best described by the term 'scorched earth', albeit in this case carried out by the attacker rather than the defender. At the time of the year this operation took place, many crops grown by the native population would already have been brought in from the fields or were in the processing of being harvested, so there was plenty available for the Assyrian Army 'to live off the land'. But what could not be used by the invader, and was already in storage, was utterly destroyed – this being an aspect of military operations with which the Assyrian Army had extensive experience.

It is very likely that the territory within Judah that was intended to be subjected to this treatment would have been pre-selected on the basis of intelligence (see section on Intelligence, pp. 247–49) acquired in the period before hostilities began. It is also likely that those 'cities' which would yield the greatest amount of booty would have been especially targeted. Large walled 'cities' that required the deployment of 'battering-rams' and so forth would have been identified in advance, as these would have needed to be carried to the respective sites by support troops. The intelligence acquired before the attack would also have noted locations of reliable water supplies and what crops would be available at the time of the attack for the subsistence of the troops and their animals. We can also assume that provision and planning was undertaken for the deportation of the thousands of captured Jews who fell into the hands of the army.

The account that Sennacherib gives of his campaign in Judah is to be found on the Taylor Prism, which is located in the British Museum in London. A second copy of the text was acquired in 1920 by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, and it is from this that the account of Assyrian operations in Judah is recounted here. On it Sennacherib relates in the part dealing with his third campaign: 'As for Hezekiah, the Jew, who did not submit to my yoke, 46 of his strong, walled cities, as well as the small cities in their neighborhood, which were without number by levelling with battering rams and by bringing up siege engines, by attacking and storming on foot, by mines, tunnels and breaches I besieged and took those cities. 200,150 people, great and small, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, cattle and sheep without number, I brought away from them and counted as spoil.'

Archaeological excavations, particularly in the highly fertile Shephelah, where Lachish was located, has provided graphic evidence of the ferocity of the Assyrian assault. Whereas the fate of Lachish itself is not actually mentioned in the Annals, although it is the subject of multiple wall reliefs later erected in a special viewing room in Sennacherib's 'palace without rival' in Nineveh, the capture and destruction of another fortified city, Azekah, is. Its capture was clearly deemed to have been an achievement, its site being a challenge by virtue of it being 'located on a mountain ridge' and described 'like pointed iron daggers without number, reaching to heaven'. It was nonetheless stormed, aided by the construction of a siege ramp. It was pillaged and destroyed much in the same manner as Lachish.

The full measure of the destruction meted out by the Assyrian Army saw other large sites such as Beth-Shemesh, Tel Eton and Tell Beit Mirsim not only ravaged but depopulated, such that the evidence from recent archaeological excavations on these sites indicates that they remained deserted during the remainder of the 7th century. Apart from those numerous settlements in the Shephelah, others in Benjamin, around Jerusalem and in the southern hills of Judah also subsequently remained deserted, in some cases for hundreds of years. Indeed, much of the destruction meted out by the Assyrian Army was still visible nearly a century later.

Although some doubt has been expressed about the numbers of persons Sennacherib claims to have deported, there are those who argue that it is a total much closer to reality, albeit probably still exaggerated. Nonetheless, the full impact of those persons deported so weakened Judah – whose population was never large prior to the Assyrian assault – that the state was but a shadow of its former self, with this depopulation a major source of its continuing weakness for the rest of the 7th century. Even as late as 609 BC not enough time had elapsed to allow Judah to fully recover from the depredations of Sennacherib's army.

AND WHAT OF JERUSALEM?

Even as this programme of destruction was proceeding, the capital city of Jerusalem had been placed under interdiction. Sennacherib relates how he dealt with Hezekiah: 'Himself, like a bird in a cage I shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city'. It is not difficult to discern the degree of contempt on Sennacherib's part to his reference to Hezekiah, not by name, but simply as 'Himself'. He is not prepared to deign to even mention him by name! The expression 'like a bird in a cage' had a long provenance in the Ancient Near East, however, and other than in just Assyrian texts. Some have argued that it was employed as an expression conveying frustration when used by certain Assyrian monarchs of their inability to take a city they had put under siege. But the Akkadian verb *eseru* when used in a military context, as for example when Tiglath-pileser III employed it about Damascus, does not mean that the city was placed under siege. Rather it refers to the notion of it being enclosed or of 'confining one's enemy'. In effect, the process is that of placing a city under blockade, of depriving the enclosed enemy of his initiative and freedom of movement. The term for conducting a siege is *lamu* and this term was *not* employed by Sennacherib when he referred to what happened at Jerusalem. Rather he stated that: 'Earthworks I threw up against him – the one coming out of the city gate I turned back to his misery.'

Another translation employs the expression, 'I laid out forts against him' in the place of 'earthworks'. These would be understood as stockades within which Assyrian troops would be stationed and the earthworks and their forts would no doubt have surrounded the city. Nonetheless, the sentiment is the same – Jerusalem was placed under blockade and whenever persons from within the city tried to leave by the 'main gate', they were vigorously turned back. That being said, the use of blockade was usually a longer-term tactic, depending on thirst, starvation and disease to afflict the population and bring about the final surrender of the city in question. However, on this occasion although Jerusalem was blockaded, it was never intended that this was to be prolonged. Sennacherib's intention was to 'bottle up' Hezekiah and his army and its inflated population, thereby forcibly reducing the Judaean monarch to a passive observer of the destruction of his kingdom, something that no doubt could be observed on a daily basis from the city walls and signalled by the large number of smoke palls that marked the Assyrian Army's progress through the Shephelah and beyond. It is entirely conceivable, indeed even likely, that the Assyrians also shepherded selected survivors back to Jerusalem to carry the grievous tidings of what was befalling the cities and countryside and their people. Psychological warfare was a major weapon in the Assyrian arsenal and this would certainly have counted as such, no doubt meant to impress upon Hezekiah the continuing futility of not coming to terms with Sennacherib.

PREVIOUS PAGES

Assyrian soldiers bring out the booty taken from Lachish after its fall. This would all have been itemized by scribes and returned in due course to Nineveh. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Also to be borne in mind is that the Assyrians probably had a good idea of the strength of Jerusalem's defences. Being the capital of the kingdom, they were formidable, and as with other examples of Assyrian attempts to capture the capital cities of other city-states, such as Arpad, the task of doing so could take years. In the case of Arpad, it took three years to finally succumb. Later in Sennacherib's reign it took his army 18 months of laying siege to Babylon before it finally fell. There is no indication that Sennacherib was prepared to commit the degree of material resources or the time that would have been required to carry Jerusalem by placing it under siege. And here we return to the point already alluded to – that he did not make his base of operations at Jerusalem, but at Lachish. Furthermore, he was not prepared nor had he any desire to carry out what over a hundred years later the Babylonian Army of Nebuchadnezzar II did, when that king embarked on a siege of Jerusalem that lasted two years before its fall in 586 BC.

Quite simply, in Sennacherib's view, Judah and Jerusalem were not that important. As it was not reduced to a province, even after the events of 701 BC, the kingdom of Judah was left alone as long as, having surrendered and with Hezekiah once again recognizing the Assyrian king as his overlord, it resumed and thereafter maintained the annual tribute payments. Its subsequent internal condition was not a matter of concern to the Assyrians. These factors alone should also repudiate the notion, argued by some historians when they have tried to reconcile the biblical accounts with those of the Assyrians, that Sennacherib launched a later and second campaign of which we have no record. For what reason would he possibly have done so? A virtually bankrupt and militarily emasculated Judah posed absolutely no problem or danger to Assyria. Babylon was deemed by Sennacherib to be of much greater moment, as were the internal affairs of Assyria itself.

How the Assyrian campaign was brought to an end is indicated in the biblical passage from the Second Book of Kings, where it states: 'King Hezekiah of Judah sent to the King of Assyria at Lachish, saying *I have done wrong* [author's italics]. Withdraw from me. Whatever you impose on me I will bear'.

To Sennacherib, the admittance that 'I have done wrong' was Hezekiah's declaration of surrender. Hezekiah acknowledged that he had broken the covenant relationship with Sennacherib and accepted that he would now have to bear a very heavy material cost to secure an Assyrian withdrawal. It was also

a signal of his willingness to resubmit to Assyria. Although there has been confusion about when Hezekiah released Padi, the imprisoned king of Ekron, it would seem logical that Hezekiah might have done so at the same time he surrendered, as a sign of his bona fides.

Hezekiah had to pay extensive tribute to secure Sennacherib's withdrawal from Judah. Such was the scale of what Sennacherib demanded of Hezekiah that the bulk had to be sent to Nineveh after the king had departed. An extensive list dating from 700 BC, that is one year after the event, is to be found in cuneiform on the Rassam cylinder in the British Museum. The Assyrian text is interpolated here with relevant sections of the biblical text (shown in italic) to illustrate the horrendous cost to Hezekiah of 'buying off' Sennacherib and also in the case of the silver the different amounts levied:

> In addition to the 30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver,
> *The King of Assyria demanded… 300 hundred talents of silver and 30 of gold. Hezekiah gave all the silver that was in the house of the Lord (the temple) and the treasures of the king's house. At the time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the LORD, and from the doorposts that King Hezekiah of Judah had overlaid and gave it to the King of Assyria.*
> There were gems, antimony, jewels, great sandu-stones, ivory beds, house chairs of ivory, elephant hides, ivory (elephants tusks and teeth), maple, boxwood, coloured (woollen) garments, garments of linen, violet and purple wool, vessels of copper, iron, bronze and lead, chariots, shields, lances, armour, girdle daggers of iron, bows and arrows, spears, countless implements of war, together with his daughters, his palace women, his male and female musicians which he had them bring after me to Nineveh, my royal city. To pay tribute and to render servitude, he despatched his messengers.

In addition, Sennacherib ordered that large areas of land in the Shephelah – Judah's most agriculturally fertile and productive region – be taken away from Judah and handed over to the Philistine cities. That being said, scholars continue to dispute whether this did actually happen or if it did, to what degree.

Much has been made of the sending of this immense trawl of tribute after Sennacherib had left Judah and returned to Nineveh, such that it is held to be evidence for the biblical claim that Sennacherib had been defeated at Jerusalem and that the Assyrian king had left Judah precipitately, with his 'tail between his legs'. It certainly was construed in this fashion in the Second Book of Kings Ch19 vs 35, but in actuality it tries to derive theological advantage from what was standard Assyrian military practice.

ABOVE

Whether at Lachish or any of the many other cities conquered by the Assyrians, the most poignant scene was the deportation of its population after its fall. We are not told where the survivors of Lachish or the many other thousands deported from Judah in 701 BC were taken. Their most likely destination was Assyria itself.
(© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Once a campaign was complete, the king rarely stayed with his army. It was not part of his role to oversee the deportation of the population and its journey to wherever it was destined, that being the task of a nominated magnate. Military units would then have overseen the escort of the deported masses. The king, accompanied by his personal escort – in all likelihood the same 1,000 elite cavalrymen of the royal guard that had attended his father and possibly still overseen by Sargon's brother, Sin-ahu-usur – returned to Nineveh. Sennacherib may have moved at some speed due to the receipt of intelligence, while he had been campaigning in Judah, that Babylon had once more broken out in rebellion, with the prime agent of the insurrection being the despised and hated Merodach-baladan, who had once more taken the throne of the kingdom.

The German Assyriologist Walter Mayer concludes his own analysis of Sennacherib's campaign in the following way: 'Looking at Assyrian sources in the light of Assyrian military logic, it is clear that our question is answered – Jerusalem was not besieged in 701. There are no wall reliefs such as those portraying the fall of Lachish that testify to a siege and no mention of one in

Assyrian reports. This absence of documentation cannot be construed as royal omission of defeat… Instead the tactics that Sennacherib used to force Hezekiah's surrender are unequivocally communicated in Assyrian reports. Equally evident is Assyria's success. With Hezekiah chastised, Jerusalem returned to its vassal status intact'.

The campaign of 701 BC was unquestionably a success for the Assyrian king. He had quashed the rebellious kingdoms which were once more held in thrall by their treaties with Nineveh. Not only would the tribute continue to flow, but the continuing exploitation of the trade of the northern and southern Levant would translate into immense resources and goods flowing into Assyria which Sennacherib would put to use in his plan to rebuild Nineveh.

BABYLON – AGAIN!

It has been suggested that Sennacherib was obsessed with Babylon and his continuing response to the southern kingdom throughout the rest of his reign seems to bear this out. No sooner had he returned to Nineveh than preparations began for the following year's campaign. By the time the army had returned from the west and been rested over the winter period, it was all prepared for a major offensive into Babylonia. This seems to be enough to refute the notion that it had been decimated in the Judaean campaign as the number purportedly destroyed by the 'angel of the lord' would have precluded any such campaign in 700 BC. As the fighting in the southern kingdom was always extremely hard, the size of the army that Sennacherib would take to Babylon would be large, and indeed in all probability larger than that taken to the west the previous year.

What was prompting this new campaign was the growing evidence that Bel-ibni, the king that Sennacherib had placed on the throne of Babylonia just two years before and crowned 'King of Sumer and Akkad', was losing control of his realm. Determining that those responsible – especially the Chaldaean tribes with the help of some of the Aramaean tribes – were thus in rebellion against Assyria, he marched into the kingdom. Once in Babylon, Bel-ibni was removed, although we are not told why. It is presumed that Sennacherib deemed him to be incompetent to have allowed his power to be diminished so quickly, or he discerned some treason in him. Thereafter the Assyrian Army set about assailing the homelands of both Aramaean and Chaldaean tribes.

Sennacherib first invaded the territory of the tribe of Bit-Dakkuri, one of the three main Chaldaean tribes, under its king Shuzubu. This entailed the Assyrian Army advancing into the marshes of the Sealand with the objective of capturing its aforementioned king. All three of the Chaldaean tribes – the other two being Bit-Amukkani and Bit-Yakin – had their 'kingdoms'

established alongside rivers. The Bit-Dakkuri were established near to Babylon and, although the Assyrian Army swept through their territory, Shuzubu escaped their clutches, with Sennacherib declaring that: 'I defeated Shuzubu, the Chaldean, who dwelt in the midst of the marshes at Bittutu. That one feared my weapons, fled alone, and his hiding place has not yet been found.'

It is thought that he fled to Elam and it was from there that he was to return some years later and be made king of Babylon. In an interesting turn of phrase Sennacherib then tells us that he turned his yoke – the army – and took the road to the territory of the Bit-Yakin. This entailed crossing more than a few rivers, as the territory of this tribe and its capital – Dur-Yakin – was located in a large and dense area of marshland. This was the tribe of Merodach-baladan, who was a major thorn in the side of the Assyrians, having seized the throne of the southern kingdom in 703 BC and intending to do so again. The Chaldaean king did not stand and fight but chose, like Shuzubu, to escape into exile: 'He gathered together the gods of his whole land in their shrines, and loaded them into ships and fled like a bird to the (Elamite) swampland of Nagite, which is in the midst of the sea.'

As a measure of his absolute determination to bring the southern kingdom to heel, Sennacherib placed his son and designated successor on the throne of Babylon: 'On my return march, I placed Ashur-nadin-shumi, my first born son, offspring of my loins, on his lordly throne and entrusted him with the wide land of Sumer and Akkad'.

At this time Sennacherib clearly did not see this action as holding a hostage to fortune, no doubt believing that having sent the troublesome Chaldaean leaders into exile, Babylon would now settle down and accept its new king despite the fact that he was an Assyrian. In this, he was to be both disappointed and frustrated. Although on this occasion Elam had not chosen to side with the Chaldaeans, the Assyrian monarch must have assumed that in dealing with any future trouble in Babylonia, he would be facing both them and the Chaldaeans.

BABYLONIA – AND AGAIN

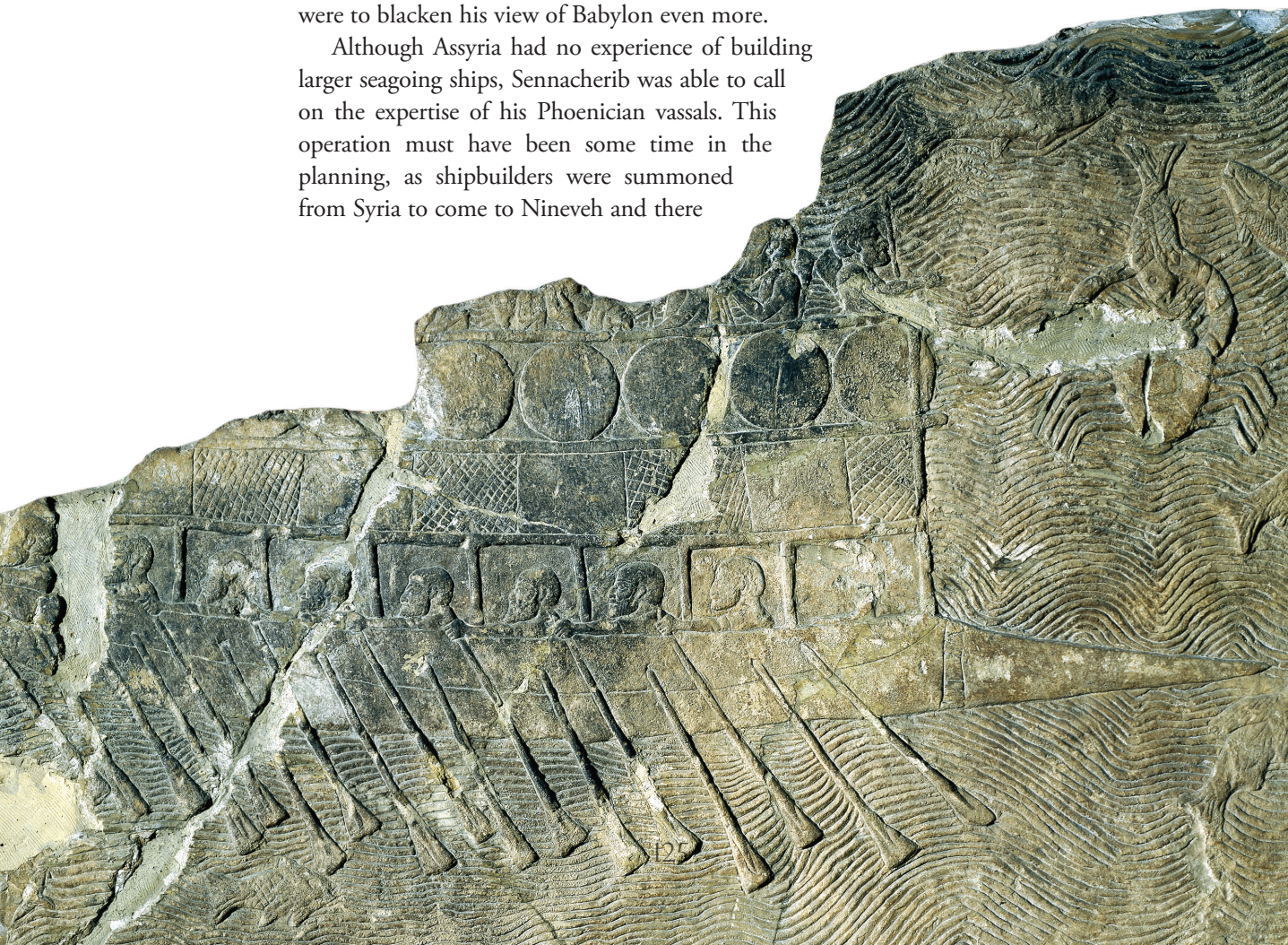
It would be another six years before Sennacherib returned to Babylon. The intervening years had been relatively peaceful. In the campaign of 694 BC the Assyrian monarch targeted Elam itself and those cities on its southern coast into which the people of Bit-Yakin had scattered before the mighty weapons of Ashur some years before. No doubt Sennacherib had obtained regular intelligence on the goings-on of Merodach-baladan, and with matters in the empire elsewhere settled to his satisfaction, the Assyrian king decided that it was time to scratch this very irritating itch.

BELOW

For his land–sea operation against the Sealand in 694 BC, Sennacherib imported craftsmen from the Levant and Cyprus to build a small fleet of biremes which were constructed at Nineveh and then taken south to the Persian Gulf. Part of such a vessel with its characteristic ram and oars is seen here in this section from a damaged relief. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

However, good intelligence or no, the wily old Chaldaean king had died in exile. Nonetheless, Sennacherib formulated a strategy that was unique in Assyrian military history – he put together a plan for an amphibious descent on the coast of Elam which also involved a land assault through the Sealand to gain Assyrian access to what is now the Persian Gulf. Although the novelty of this plan might have been presumed by Sennacherib to be ingenious, it was to rebound upon him with profoundly personal consequences that were to blacken his view of Babylon even more.

Although Assyria had no experience of building larger seagoing ships, Sennacherib was able to call on the expertise of his Phoenician vassals. This operation must have been some time in the planning, as shipbuilders were summoned from Syria to come to Nineveh and there



on the banks of the Tigris they built a number of ships based on Phoenician designs. Supplies of timber of the right sort had to be acquired, thus intimating a well-thought-out supply chain of materials. Experienced sailors from Cyprus and prisoners from Tyre and Sidon were to man the completed vessels. There is no question, judging from the account in Sennacherib's Annals, that he was immensely proud of what he was accomplishing: 'They skillfully built magnificent ships, a product characteristic of their own land… They let the sailors sail down the Tigris with them down stream to the city of Opis.

OPPOSITE

Sennacherib in his command chariot on campaign in Babylonia. His final campaign there led to the destruction of Babylon itself. From the time of Tiglath-pileser III Babylon had been the most important focus of Assyrian policy and military operations.
(© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Then, from the city of Opis, they lifted them up onto the dry land and dragged them on rollers to Sippar and guided them into the Arkahtu canal where they let them sail downstream to the canal of Bit-Dakkuri which is in Chaldea.'

It was here that the ships were loaded with soldiers and supplies while Sennacherib and the rest of the army followed alongside on the bank of the river. After a five-day delay caused by inclement weather, they finally reached 'the mouth of the river where the Euphrates debouches its water into the rolling sea'. Having made sacrifice to the god Ea, the fleet crossed the Gulf. The enemy, however, saw the ships approaching and drew up an army composed of both Chaldaeans and Elamites; the two forces clashed near the mouth of the river Elaya. An Assyrian victory resulted in the garrisons and the Chaldaean population being carried off together with 'all the gods of Bit-Yakin, their property' and the local Elamites and their 'wagons, horses, mules and donkeys'. These were loaded onto the boats, which returned to the other side of the Gulf where Sennacherib was waiting. Though he tells us he 'recruited 30,500 archers and 20,200 shield bearers' which he incorporated into the *kisir sharruti* or Royal Army, such numbers could not have been transported in the ships and must have been marched overland.

There is still controversy about what transpired next, brought about by a seeming confusion in the Assyrian texts. We will however proceed with this account. The Elamite king, Hallushu, seized the initiative and, rather than confronting the Assyrian Army in the south of his country, marched his army north-west and invaded Babylonia – in effect outflanking Sennacherib and isolating the Assyrian Army that was still in the south of the kingdom. Hallushu took the city of Sippar, entering it at the end of the month of Tashritu. On receipt of this news, the leading elements of Babylonian society seized Ashur-nadin-shumi and handed him over to the Elamites. He was taken back to Elam and presumably murdered by them, as nothing more was heard of him.

Although the Elamites and the Babylonians – now led by the returned Shuzubu, who had usurped the throne – attempted to defeat the entrapped Assyrian Army in southern Babylonia, Sennacherib was able to defeat the armies of each in turn. Shuzubu was captured, bound in fetters, and returned to Nineveh, where he was humiliated by being exhibited at the Citadel Gate

along with a bear which was probably staked to a post, to be viewed with derision by those entering and leaving the city.

There can be no doubt that Sennacherib had had enough of attempting to reconcile Babylon by the use of the various political expedients he had employed up until this date, and with the murder of his son he was now bent on bloody revenge. In 691 BC he led a large army south, but was prevented from reaching Babylon by the need to engage a joint Elamite-Babylonian army which had advanced northwards to meet him. The two forces clashed in a very large and ferocious battle at a place called Halule (an account of the battle is described on pp. 282–87). Although Sennacherib claimed a famous victory, the Assyrian Army nonetheless returned to the homeland rather than continue southwards into Babylonia. This suggests its losses were extremely heavy. One year later, Sennacherib began the campaign that would lead, in his eyes, to a final solution of the Babylonian problem.

By then, the Assyrian Army had sufficiently recouped its manpower and equipment so that in 690 BC Sennacherib marched it southwards and placed Babylon under siege. While there is no question that the intention was to take the city, and while this would no doubt satisfy the vengeful nature of this Assyrian monarch seeing this as the justifiable punishment for the death of his son and heir, it has also been suggested that other motives were at work. The obvious one was economic. Babylon was an immensely rich city, the booty of which would do much to fill out Assyria's coffers and help finance the king's ambitious building projects at Nineveh. Furthermore, Sennacherib did not have the same regard for Babylon as his predecessors had and, although he was mindful of the regard in which it was held within Assyria, was not inclined to view it as any more special than any other city he had laid siege to and stormed.

It has also been suggested that its prolonged opposition to Assyria indicated that it could emerge as a major power to challenge its northern neighbour. Certainly, the Chaldaean tribes, who were by now very 'Babylonian', would never be content to reside in Assyria's shadow and were ambitious to secure the defeat of the Assyrian menace. The Assyrian monarch had no doubt decided that the destruction of Babylon would put paid to any such aspirations. On this occasion, Elamite assistance to Babylon was not forthcoming, that kingdom having problems of its own. The Assyrian Army marched south and straightaway placed Babylon under siege. Given the significance of the event, it gets surprisingly little coverage in Assyrian accounts, and it is to a Babylonian document dated to the tail end of 690 BC that we turn to gain an insight into conditions in the city, which were already horrendous some 15 months before its fall: 'In the time of Mushezib-Marduk [Shuzubu], king of Babylon, the land was gripped by siege, famine, hunger, want, and hard times.

Everything was changed and reduced to nothing. Two *qa* of barley sold for one shekel of silver. The city gates were barred, and a person could not go out in any of the four directions. The corpses of men, with no one to bury them, filled the squares of Babylon.'

The Assyrian account of the siege comes from the Bavian Inscription of Sennacherib. One can detect in it the frustration borne of nearly a decade of bloody intermittent warfare that had taken such a toll on Assyrian manpower. But above all he was revenging himself for the murder of his son and heir:

> I completely invested that city, with mines and engines my hands [took the city]… With their corpses I filled the city squares, Shuzubu, king of Babylonia, together with his family and his (nobles) I carried off alive to my land. The wealth of that city – silver, gold, precious stones, property and goods, I doled out to my people and they made it their own.
>
> The city and its houses, foundations and its walls I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire. The wall and outer wall, temples and gods, temple tower of brick and earth, as many as there were I razed and I dumped them into the Arahtu-canal. Through the midst of that city I dug canals. I flooded its site with water, and the very foundations thereof I destroyed. I made its destruction more complete than by a flood. That in days, the site of that city, and its temples and gods might not be remembered, I completely blotted it out with (floods) of water and made it like a meadow.

It has been doubted whether the destruction of Babylon was as complete as Sennacherib has described it. But it was regarded by many, including in Assyria, as an unholy act, not the least reason being Assyrian destruction of the gods of Babylon. The statue of Marduk, the god of the city, is thought to have been taken back to Assyria and was to remain absent for 20 years before being returned by Sennacherib's grandson. The Assyrian king no doubt had hoped that this act would finally break the back of Babylonian opposition – and certainly it gave no more trouble to Assyria for the remainder of the king's reign. But far from reconciling the peoples of the southern land to their northern neighbour, it instead fomented a deep hatred and loathing which would sustain the people of Babylonia – now more than ever before united in their antipathy whatever their ethnic origins – in the years to come. Sennacherib and his destruction of the city would in time, even after Babylon was rebuilt, become infamous in memory and no doubt a great sustainer of the hate that would eventually fuel and motivate the Babylonian Army in its participation in the destruction and demise of Assyria later in the century.

OPPOSITE

The top register shows the siege of a city under way, and the lower register shows matters after its fall. Illustrated here is a common Assyrian policy – that of 'godnapping'. The statues of the gods of the city were taken back to Assyria. The act symbolized the desertion of the city by its gods – hence its fall to the Assyrian Army. The statues were sometimes returned, as was that of Marduk to Babylon at the beginning of the reign of Ashurbanipal.
(© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Although the term is still subject to much debate among Assyriologists, there are grounds for suggesting that the final years of Sennacherib's reign can be described as a *pax Assyriaca.* The king was focused on the development of Nineveh, the building of his 'palace without equal' within it and numerous hydrological programmes designed to 'water' the ever-growing capital of the empire. However, the last years of this king's life were not personally quiescent, but rather highly contentious as the Assyrian court was thrown into disarray by an emerging succession crisis. As the principle of primogeniture did not govern the succession in Assyria, the nomination of a successor being purely within the gift of the king, this could lead to the emergence of partisan groups in the court if it was perceived that the king was changing his mind as to who this would be. This indeed occurred in 683 BC, when for reasons unknown his long-term nominated successor and crown prince Urdu-Mulissu was dropped by Sennacherib and the youngest of his sons, Esarhaddon, appointed in his place. Speculation about why he did this has revolved primarily around the machinations of one of his wives, Zakutu/Naqia, the mother of Esarhaddon, who seems to have become a very powerful influence behind the throne. Be that as it may, the dropping of Urdu-Mulissu and his replacement as crown prince by Esarhaddon saw the outbreak of severe dissension in the Assyrian court.

Unwilling to acquiesce in his father's decision, Urdu-Mulissu and his associates began to pressure the king to change his mind once more and reinstate him as crown prince. This pressure seems to have built to the extent that Sennacherib sent or exiled Esarhaddon from the court to some place in Syria, in all probability for his own protection. What this did not do was protect the king, as in 681 BC Sennacherib was assassinated whilst at prayer in a temple in Nineveh by one of his sons. It very much looked as if the kingdom and empire would now erupt in civil war.

CHAPTER SIX

ESARHADDON, 680–669 BC

SECURING THE THRONE

Esarhaddon received the news of his father's murder quite soon after it happened, with word having been brought to him by a messenger dispatched by supporters in Nineveh – in all probability sent by his mother. His reaction was to order the speedy assembly of some of the troops under his command in preparation for a rapid move at a moment's notice. But before doing so, although now legally the new king of Assyria, he nonetheless chose to submit to oracular confirmation by appealing to the gods: 'For permission to assume the kingship belonging to my father's house and to exercise my priestly office, I raised my hands in prayer to Ashur, Sin, Shamash, Bel, Nabu and Nergal, to Ishtar of Nineveh and Ishtar of Arbela and they received my words with favour. In token of their approval they favoured me with a trustworthy oracle; "Go, do not give up. We shall go at thy side, we will slay thy foes".'

With just a minimal force – most probably just cavalry and a few chariots – Esarhaddon made his way 'toward Nineveh, painfully but quickly', even though it seems to have been extremely cold. Crossing 'the land of Hanigalbat' in the northern Jazirah, he made rapid progress before running

OPPOSITE

Archers from the reign of Esarhaddon. They wear the armoured corselet now de rigeur for the troops of the *kisir sharruti*. It is also noticeable that archers are almost always shown being protected, when shooting their arrows, by shield bearers.
(Zev Radovan / Alamy Stock Photo)

into an enemy unit that had been dispatched by the regicides from Nineveh to oppose him. They met in a short but sharp battle, in the region of the Upper Habur. However, many of the opposing force defected, recognizing the legitimacy of Esarhaddon, declaring 'this is our king'. Reaching the Tigris River, 'at the word of Sin and Shamash, the gods, the lords of the dyke, my armies scrambled over the wide Tigris as across an irrigation ditch'. On the eighth day of the month of Addaru, Esarhaddon entered Nineveh and took his seat on his father's throne.

The main ringleaders of the plot – his older brothers – had already made their escape, leaving their supporters to their fate. Esarhaddon was not inclined to forgive those that remained, and he tells us: 'The soldiers, the rebels who had fomented the plot to seize the rulership of Assyria for my brothers, their ranks I examined to the last man and I laid heavy penalty upon them'.

In what was a very extensive purge, many of those found guilty were executed, and as guilt by association was assumed, the inscriptions are quite clear in stating that punishment extended even to 'their seed' – that is, the families of the plotters. Although probably seen as Esarhaddon's vengeance, it was also understood to be that of the gods, who had made their support clear for the new king at the time of his election before his father's death, when through the priests it had been declared that he was Sennacherib's true successor. Herein lay the 'sin' that Esarhaddon refers to, for the regicides and their supporters had opposed the will of the gods.

A NEW POLICY TOWARDS BABYLON

From the outset of his reign it became clear that Esarhaddon was embarking on a completely new policy towards Babylon. Indeed, while never saying so explicitly, the new king indicated his total disagreement with Sennacherib's stance towards Babylon. Esarhaddon was of the opinion that his father's desecration of the city had been a grievous error, as was the view of many of the Assyrian populace who viewed Babylon and its culture with respect, indeed reverence. Esarhaddon saw the violent death of his grandfather, Sargon II, many years before, and of his father as divine punishment visited upon them for their respective 'sins'. It offers us quite an insight into the mind of this king, and of his desire not to offend the gods in the manner of his predecessors, that he had a stone slab inscribed with details of their respective sins set into a cellar in the temple of Ashur over which he used to prostrate himself when communing with the god. There can be no doubt that the policy of the new king in embracing the rebuilding of Babylon was seen by him as an expiation for their actions.

The task of rebuilding the southern city would entail the rest of his reign and beyond, into that of his successor.

However, a theological sleight of hand of hand was also required to allow him to do this. To prevent blame being publicly lain at the feet of Sennacherib for the destruction of Babylon, the former king of Assyria was exempted from responsibility for the act. Instead, it was attributed solely to the god Marduk, who in deputizing Sennacherib to destroy the city was punishing the Babylonians for the great 'sin' they committed against him during the reign of Mushezib-Marduk. This king had ordered the plundering of the treasury of the temple of Esagila – stripping it of all the wealth inside that 'belonged' to the god Marduk in order to use it to bribe the king of Elam to enter the war against the Assyrians. This act, according to the Assyrian retelling, had prompted Marduk to become so angry that Sennacherib had been induced by the god to destroy the city on his behalf. In addition, Marduk had decreed that Babylon should be abandoned for 70 years. However, in this telling: 'His heart was quickly soothed, and he reversed the numbers and thus ordered its reoccupation after 11 years'.

Herein lay the sleight of hand, in that a deft reversing of the cuneiform signs for the number 60 plus ten turns that number into ten plus one. A number corresponding to the beginning of the reign of Assyria's new king.

Esarhaddon thus ordered the rebuilding of Babylon, a project helped by the ruin of the city not being as extensive as the destruction claimed to have been wrought upon it by Sennacherib in his Annals. The site was cleared of the reeds and other vegetation that had grown up on it, and the many water channels that had been dug were filled in. The walls around the city were then rebuilt, an extensive task as they covered many miles, but the most important achievement was the rebuilding of the temple of Marduk – the ziggurat of Esagila. Such was necessary before the statues of Marduk and the other great gods, at present in exile in Assyria, could be returned whence they had been taken by Sennacherib's army. In reality, this did not occur until the opening year of the reign of his son and successor, Ashurbanipal, in 668 BC.

In the meantime, as the rebuilding of the religious sites continued, Esarhaddon restarted the cultic offerings at the Esagila. As progress continued, the king ordered that much of the population that had been dispersed within the empire be returned to the city. Houses were rebuilt, new canals were dug, and date and other fruit orchards were also replanted. And where relevant, he reinstated the privileges and tax exemptions that had been taken away from them. As life returned to a degree of normality, the serving governor of Babylon wrote to the king later in the reign: 'To the king my lord: your servant, Ubaru, the governor of Babylon. May the gods

ABOVE

Esarhaddon's son and successor Ashurbanipal (668–?627 BC) on one of his lion hunts. The original wall reliefs showing these very finely executed scenes are to be found in the British Museum in London and represent some of the finest artwork ever executed by Assyrian sculptors. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Nabu and Marduk bless the king. … the people of Babylon welcome me and they bless the king every day, saying: "He is the one who returned Babylon's captives and booty".'

Even the kings of the Chaldaean tribes in the Sealand, the normally ever-hostile foes of Assyria, were reported by Ubaru the governor of Babylon as bending the knee to Assyrian power on this occasion, saying: 'the chiefs of Chaldea from Sippar to the mouth of the sea bless the king saying: "He is the one who resettled Babylon". All the lands are happy before the king, my lord.'

The reconstruction of Babylon provided the backdrop for Esarhaddon's reign and continued uninterrupted by events elsewhere.

THE MILITARY CAMPAIGNS

The military operations that took place during the 12 years that Esarhaddon sat on the Assyrian throne are chronologically problematic. This difficulty extends to the actual number of campaigns that took place, although the account of the Second Egyptian Campaign in 671 BC is recorded in the Royal Inscriptions as the tenth. The very first campaign of Esarhaddon was carried out in the second year of his reign and was in effect a military demonstration that took his army southwards through the Levant to the border of Egypt. Here they captured the city of Arza and deported its king. The Egyptians may well have construed that this new king of Assyria had possible ambitions in their direction.

Campaigning in Anatolia

By the beginning of the reign of Esarhaddon, the great arc of territory running from Iran in the east through Urartu and westwards into Asia Minor was effectively dominated by the tribal and nomadic Cimmerians, who had originally debouched into Urartu via the Caucasus. They had no coherent political organization, and their geographical spread was a consequence of their widespread tribal dispersion. There was, however, by the time of Esarhaddon the emergence of a nascent identity where several tribes had come together under the leadership of one Teushpa. Entering this same part of the world at this time, also via the Caucasus, was another nomadic tribal group by the name of the Scythians. As with the Cimmerians, to whom they were probably related in some way, they were horse warriors and a formidable military force. For Esarhaddon, the problems that emerged at the start of his reign in southern Anatolia, primarily in Tabal and Que, saw him having to deal with the Cimmerians, but as the bulk of the Scythians chose to move south-eastwards it would not be long before Esarhaddon came into contact with them.

Although we know that Esarhaddon campaigned in southern Anatolia, there is some difficulty in determining how many military expeditions were directed by the Assyrians to this part of their empire, not just to deal with the Cimmerian threat but also with recalcitrant city-states which sought to detach themselves from Assyrian suzerainty.

It was in the year following his accession that Esarhaddon campaigned in this region, as the Cimmerians were seeking to intrude on Assyrian dependencies here. Although we do not have many details, the Assyrian Army met the Cimmerians in battle and Esarhaddon states in his Annals: ‘Teushpa, the Cimmerian, a barbarian whose home was afar off, I cut down with the sword in the land of Khubushna together with all his troops.’

Esarhaddon also dealt with a long-term problem for the Assyrians in the form of the people of Hilakku, who served as a persistent irritant and were protected by the mountainous terrain (a territory of little value) wherein they lived, due to it being extremely difficult for the Assyrian Army to gain access to them. Although Esarhaddon lists Hilakku as having been captured in this campaign, it has been speculated that over the next three years perhaps one or two other campaigns were directed at Hilakku and Tabal. But these did not succeed in winning them back and they remained nominally free of Assyrian domination until the reign of Ashurbanipal. The principal benefit to Assyria from the campaign of 679 BC was that the Cimmerian defeat deflected them westwards where they proceeded, in concert with the Scythians, to attack Phrygia which fell to them in 676 BC However, this did not bring other problems to an end for the Assyrians in the same area.

One of these had to do with the kingdom of Kindu and Sissu. Its king, by the name of Sanduarri, had entered into a naval alliance with Sidon, which Esarhaddon had defeated in 677 BC as described below. The following year saw an Assyrian military expedition to the region, which led to the defeat of Sanduarri, his capture and decapitation. The other, and much more difficult, opponent was a local Anatolian warlord called Mugallu. His military power was sufficiently effective that he was able to lay siege to and capture the fortress city of Melid. This city was one of the linchpins of Assyria's defences in the north-west. He then saw off an attempt by the Assyrian Army in 675 BC to recapture the city, besting them in battle, an achievement rarely accomplished. In consequence, he was awarded the title of 'Mugallu of Melid'. His success did not finish there and he later managed to assume control over Tabal, by which point he had become a problem for Esarhaddon's successor.

Western Iran

In Iran, Assyria's primary concern was with the Cimmerians, Mannaeans and Scythians and the growing power of the Medes. As ever, Assyria's interest and overriding strategic concern with the latter was the continued supply of horseflesh, which the empire still required in vast quantities. Developments that occurred in Esarhaddon's reign suggested that this supply could come under threat.

Of the three peoples mentioned above, it was with the Mannaeans that the Assyrians had had the greatest contact. They had been present in the region for some while and had been the object of attention for Sargon II when, as we have seen, two of the 'kingdoms' that made up Mannaea, Wishdish and Zikirtu, had fought alongside the Urartians at the battle of

RIGHT

Assyrian archer, late 7th/6th centuries BC. The composite bow type is that which is described in the section on weapons. (Iunstream / Alamy Stock Photo)

Mount Waus. The Cimmerians, Scythians and Mannaeans all shared a common cultural heritage inasmuch as they spoke Indo-Aryan languages. However, they did not by any means form a common front, and they were opportunistic in whom they supported or allied themselves to. Nonetheless, all viewed Assyria with covetous eyes and shared a desire to acquire its wealth and lands where possible.

Ahseri, the Mannaean king of Zikirtu, had thrown in his lot with the Cimmerians and the Scythians and they started to raid across the border into Assyrian territory. Assyrian forces deployed therein fought off these raids, which culminated in a battle in 676 BC in which the Assyrians defeated them, with Esarhaddon declaring in his inscriptions: 'I scattered the Mannaean people, intractable barbarians and I smote with the sword the armies of Ishpakai, the Scythian.'

Attempts to divide and rule among these three peoples failed. Esarhaddon is said to have even considered offering one of his daughters in marriage to Bartatua, the King of the Scythians, to bring him onto the Assyrian side. An attempt by an Assyrian Army to invade Zikirtu in 676 BC failed. It was only some years later, in 663 BC (or possibly later, in the reign of Ashurbanipal) after the Cimmerians and Scythians had upped tents and moved away westwards to assist in the attack on Phrygia, leaving Zikirtu bereft of allies, that the Assyrians tried again. This invasion was led by a magnate and was not a great military success, but it was sufficient to prompt the servants of King Ahseri to murder their lord and put in his place a son who later made his peace with Ashurbanipal. This was to remain in place with Assyria until the fall of the empire.

The Medes

Of all the peoples living on the vast Iranian plateau, the Medes were by far the most numerous and, from Esarhaddon's perspective, both potentially dangerous and at the same time politically useful to Assyria. This stemmed

from his notion that the Medes could be inveigled to function as a buffer region between the tribal newcomers and the Assyrian provinces of the Zagros. Although the Medes were still tribal, they were sufficiently 'civilized' to have built numerous cities that dotted the lands of northern Iran, with each of these being ruled by 'city lords' – a hereditary position that carried with it leadership over the 'city' and the area it 'ruled'.

At this time the four provinces that had been established in the Zagros – Parsua and Bit-Hamban by Tiglath-pileser III in the 740s BC, and Kar-Sharrukin and Kar-Nergal by Sargon II in 716 BC – were still extant in the reign of Esarhaddon, although there are no sources that attest to their situation post 669 BC. The Assyrians fought a number of battles with the Medes at this time and one particular expedition saw the farthest eastward advance by an Assyrian army in the mid-670s BC, reaching as far as the salt desert of Dasht-e Kavir that lies in the midst of the Iranian plateau. The Assyrian provinces contained Median 'city lords' within them, with the latter to all intents and purposes functioning as vassal rulers – a fairly unique arrangement for how the Assyrians exercised control within their eastern provinces. This was testimony to the Assyrian perception of those whom Esarhaddon called the 'mighty Medes' – a reference to their vast population rather than military effectiveness – and the strategic importance of the relationship that turned on the continuing flow of horses in huge numbers as annual tribute for the Assyrian Army. Other than horses, the lands occupied by the Medes had nothing to offer Assyria.

Esarhaddon nevertheless certainly viewed the Medes with concern, as such a huge population had the potential, if they could sink their tribal differences, to seriously threaten the Assyrian position in the Zagros. Nor was he or any other Assyrian king unmindful of their strategic dependence on the Medes for the regular supply of horseflesh without which the empire would be in a dire situation. This potential issue was highlighted by the emergence of a certain 'city lord' by the name of Khshathrita, son of Daiakku, who generated a degree of trouble for the Assyrians by uniting a number of tribes and attacking a number of their settlements. Although the army in the region was able to deal with him, he still figured as a person of concern in Esarhaddon's oracular consultations with the gods. Any concern that the king may have harboured

OPPOSITE

The ultimate expression of the war chariot in Ancient Assyria. This type of chariot saw service only in the 6th century BC and was possibly created to employ the very 'large' horses introduced from Egypt and Nubia. Its wheels were taller than a man and it was pulled by four horses but still employed only one archer.
(© The Trustees of the British Museum)

about the Medes, however, did not prevent him from employing them as bodyguards for the royal family in Nineveh and sources attest to a fairly large number of Medes living in Ashur.

Preparing for the Egyptian Campaign

The primary military focus of Esarhaddon's reign was directed towards his Egyptian campaigns, and these must have occupied the principal resources of the Assyrian Army in 674 and in 671 BC. We have already noted that in the reigns of the three previous monarchs who campaigned in the southern Levant, they consciously eschewed an invasion of Egypt, halting at the nominal frontier at the 'Brook of Egypt'. Their interest, notwithstanding awareness of ongoing subversive Egyptian interference in the region of the Levant, was fundamentally economic, as has been pointed out earlier. That being said, Sennacherib had been very mindful of Egypt's influence in the Judaean revolt of Hezekiah and found its involvement very provocative. It has been speculated by some historians that he may even have entertained the idea of invading Egypt himself at some point after 701 BC, but that did not come to pass. It was thus left to his son to settle Assyrian differences with the Nilotic kingdom.

Egypt remained the last great power in Assyrian's purview that had yet to be brought within the empire. That it was Esarhaddon who finally grasped this nettle was possibly due to his unwillingness to any longer tolerate Egyptian attempts to subvert Assyrian hegemony in Syria and the Levant. For many years the perception had been that wherever and whenever there was insurrection or rebellion in that part of the empire, the hand of Egypt was always seen to be at work subverting Assyrian rule. In addition, all Assyrian kings wanted to be seen to be achieving more than their predecessors and there can be no doubt that for Esarhaddon to secure the conquest of Egypt would certainly be something that none of his predecessors had ever achieved. A very definite case of royal one-upmanship!

Any invasion of Egypt presupposed the quiescence of the city-states of the Levant, as Assyria needed to be assured of secure supply lines as they ran through Syria, Phoenicia and Palestine. The revolt by Abdi-Milkulti of Sidon in 677 BC in alliance with Kindu and Sissu in Anatolia had prompted a very rapid Assyrian response. Once more the subversive hand of Egypt was seen to lie behind this foolhardy attempt by Sidon to forsake its vassal status, for Abdi-Milkulti could have been in no doubt when he chose to withhold his tribute payment, what the Assyrian response would be. Whether or not the campaign to suppress the rebellion was led by Esarhaddon or one of his magnates, Sidon was dealt with dispatch. After a short siege, the city was 'torn up and cast into the midst of the sea'. Abdi-Milkulti was captured and beheaded along with the survivors of the royal family, and the elite of the city deported to Assyria. Tyre benefited from

the demise of its competitor, being rewarded by two Sidonian cities being handed over to its control. In 676 BC Sidon was turned into a province, indeed the very last to be established in that part of the world. The city was rebuilt and renamed Kar-Ashur-ahu-iddina, meaning 'Esarhaddon's Harbour', a strong indication of where lay Assyria's interest in the Levant.

In 676 BC a very demanding campaign was lauched against a territory called Bazza – now identified as located in north-western Arabia and close to the island state of Dilmun (modern Bahrain). The challenges of this operation were such as to prompt Esarhaddon to describe it in a letter to the god where he stated that he defeated six kings and two queens and installed a puppet ruler by the name of Layale.

In addition to a tame Levant, it was also recognized by Esarhaddon that any invasion of Egypt would require support and assistance from the Arabs, since it was accepted by the Assyrians that no large-scale military campaign in that part of the world could be undertaken without them. Their knowledge and experience of the desert and access to water supplies was essential for the Assyrian Army to traverse the Sinai Desert successfully. Between 676 and 671 BC Esarhaddon embarked on a campaign to win over the Arabs to his side by returning to them the statues of their gods that his father had deported to Assyria. Over the following years, there was internal trouble among the Arabs as different individuals vied for their leadership, but when one Yuata, who had succeeded to that role, faced rebellion, Esarhaddon dispatched Assyrian troops to help suppress it. The relations with the Arabs thereafter became more stable, such that in his second invasion of Egypt in 671 BC Esarhaddon received much assistance from them in his crossing of the Sinai Desert. One tribe in particular, that of Mibsam, seems to have provided the bulk of the help to the Assyrians in that enterprise.

First Egyptian Campaign, 674 BC

Despite other operations going on in the north of the empire directed at Melid in the late 670s BC, major preparations must have been under way for the Egyptian campaign. In terms of distance to be traversed, the manpower needed for the army, the number of horses and camels and other resources required, this was possibly the largest operation yet undertaken by the Assyrian Army. It would also have involved contingents from the vassal states from Syria through to Palestine.

Even so, the first invasion attempt was a disaster, not that the operation can be read about in the Assyrian Royal Archives, where the entry for the year 674 BC records only a minor campaign in Babylonia. Our knowledge

of what occurred in this first invasion attempt is sketchy; the little information coming from the Babylonian Chronicle states that the Assyrian Army was defeated in Egypt on 'the fifth of Addaru 674'. It can be presumed only that the Assyrian defeat was substantial and that the army perhaps suffered as much from the privations of two desert crossings as it did at the hands of the Egyptian Army. It is not surprising therefore that the Royal Inscriptions make no mention of what may well have been a disaster. That it took another two years before Esarhaddon tried again with an invasion of Egypt suggests that both manpower and resources needed to be recouped.

INTERREGNUM: THE SUCCESSION ARRANGEMENTS

Although no military campaign was launched at all in 672 BC, Esarhaddon had his hands full in seeking to bring about an arrangement that would make for a smooth transition in the succession to ensure that there was no repetition of the problems surrounding his own. His solution was that his eldest son Shamash-shum-ukin would become King of Babylon, while a younger by the name of Ashurbanipal (Ashur-ban-apli), would be nominated as crown prince of Assyria to become king on Esarhaddon's death. The brothers had different mothers and there was the potential for intrigue in both the harem and the palace, so in order to avoid this, Esarhaddon summoned many of the top persons within the empire – be they Assyrian or otherwise – to Nineveh to swear oaths to the gods to uphold this arrangement. In May 672 BC, in the presence of his magnates, high officers of the army and the representatives from vassal states within the empire, Esarhaddon formally declared Ashurbanipal to be his heir and Shamash-shum-ukin viceroy of Babylon. The oath that they were required to swear had been written down in multiple copies in cuneiform on large clay tablets: 'When Esarhaddon King of Assyria dies, you will seat Ashurbanipal the Crown Prince upon the royal throne; he will exercise the kingship and lordship of Assyria over you. You will protect him in country and town; you will fight to the death for him… and you will help Shamash-shum-ukin, his coequal brother, the Crown Prince of Babylon, upon the throne of Babylon.'

While to Esarhaddon this solution to his perceived problem appeared rational at the time, the unresolved tensions contained within the compact would emerge in due course following his death, with consequences for the brothers and the empire.

TO EGYPT – AGAIN!

Whatever the causes of the disaster of the first campaign against Egypt, they were not so dire as to prompt Esarhaddon not to make a second attempt. When he did so in 671 BC it must be presumed that the Assyrian Army was much better prepared logistically. Certainly, lessons were in all probability learnt and applied to the force that now set out on its second campaign against the Nilotic kingdom. We also know that Esarhaddon put an oracular request to the gods about whether or not the campaign would be a success, and he would return from it safely.

We must presume that the gods gave their blessing because the campaign began early in the year, before the start of the normal campaigning season. Esarhaddon tells us that the Assyrian Army departed Ashur in the month of Nisannu and advanced down the coast of the Levant. Egyptian agents had been at work, no doubt hoping to delay the Assyrian advance, having successfully prompted the king of Tyre to rebel against Assyria. Esarhaddon tells us in his Inscriptions that: 'in the course of my campaign I threw up earthworks against Ba'lu [Baal], king of Tyre, who had put his trust in his friend Tirhakah [Taharqa], king of Ethiopia, had thrown off my royal yoke and had sent me insolent messages. Food and drink which would have kept them alive I withheld.'

The city was subsequently conquered and looted. Ba'lu was forced to cede all of his cities, yet Tyre was not annexed and he surprisingly retained his throne. In the light of the primary objective of the campaign, the Assyrian king wished to waste as little time as possible dealing with Tyre.

Thereafter, the advance towards Egypt resumed but the army halted at Rapihu by the Brook of Egypt where the king in his inscriptions exclaimed 'there is no river'. The soldiers, who it seems 'were already in distress' from the heat, 'he made drink water drawn from a well using ropes and chains'. It was now that his arrangements with the Arabs paid off, as they arrived with many hundreds of camels and water in animal skins by the thousands. It was with their guidance that the army struck out across the central Sinai and not by the Via Maris, which was in probability the route that the Egyptians expected the Assyrians to take, as they had done so in their first attempted invasion. The journey took 27 days and was unquestionably difficult, with encounters, Esarhaddon claims, with 'two-headed snakes'; the king attributed the survival of most of his troops (and we must presume their horses) to the god Marduk.

The arrival of the Assyrian Army emerging from the desert where it was not expected caused surprise within Egypt. And the invading forces did not need much time to recuperate from what was clearly a very demanding march, as they successfully fought against the Egyptians on three occasions and defeated them in short order in the month of Du'uzu. In consequence, Taharqa

THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE, 745 BC TO 612 BC
Hattusas
KIZIL IRMAK
Gordion
Kululu
Sultanhan
TABAL
TIL-GARIMM
URARTU
LAKE VAN
PHRYGIA
Topada
Bohcha
MALATYA
Malatya
LYDIA
Shinuhtu
Golludag
BIT-ZAMANI
SHUBRIA
URARTU
CASPIAN SEA
LAKE URMIA
GURGUM
KUMMUH
Amid
Hubishna
Kemerhisar
Marqasi
Tushan
(?) Mount Wuas
TUWANA
Samsat
HILAKKU
Azilwandas
YAUDI
CARCHEMISH
BIT-BAHIANI
Nisibin
UPPER ZAB
Carchemish
Hasanlu
Tarsus
QUE
Sam'al
Harran
Guzana
MANNAEA
TAURUS MOUNTAINS
Hazazu
Til Barsip
Dur-Sharrukin
HABRIRUI
UNQI
Arpad
BIT-ADINI
Nineveh
Kunulua
Aleppo
Zamahe
BIT-AGUSHI
Arbil
RASAPPA
ZAMUA
LU'ASH
Emar
BIT-HALUPE
ASSYRIA
Ugarit
HAMA
Arrapha
MEDIA
Ashur
LOWER ZAB
Hama
HABUR
LAQE
Arvad
Terqa
DIYALA
ZAGROS MOUNTAINS
Godin Tepe
Tepe Giyan
Byblos
SUHU
(?) Halulue
EUPHRATES
Baba Jan
Beirut
ELLIPI
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
ARAM
Damascus
Dur-Kurigalzu
Sidon
Opis
Tyre
Sippar
ARABIA
TIGRIS
(?) Til-Tuba
ELAM
Samaria
Babylon
BABYLONIA
Susa
Ashdod
ISRAEL
Nippur
AMMON
Jerusalem
CHALDAEA
Gaza
JUDAH
DEAD SEA
Uruk
PHILISTIA
MOAB
SEALAND
EDOM
Ur
EGYPT
Memphis
NILE
THE GULF
Phoenician city
Capital (where known)
Major battle
Ancient coastline
Ancient course of river
Territories conquered/annexed by Tiglath-pileser III
Territories conquered/annexed by Sargon II
Lower Egypt conquered by Esarhaddon (671 BC).
Elam devastated by Ashurbanipal in 639 BC, although not occupied. By 612 BC the empire was gone.
Near Eastern trade routes (based on Assyrian annals)
N
0
150 MILE
0
150KM

OPPOSITE

Assyrian expansion was linked to control of the trade routes in the Near East, as shown on this map. There is a correlation between the trade routes and the territorial reach of the Assyrian Empire at the time of its zenith – that is about 670 BC. It was Esarhaddon's conquest of Lower Egypt that saw the Neo-Assyrian Empire reach this size. This map also shows the phases by which the empire grew, and under which kings. The greatest territorial acquisitions were achieved under Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II in the 40 years between 745 and 705 BC. Thereafter, only Upper Egypt and Elam were added to the empire. By 612 BC the empire had been swept away and Assyria itself had fallen to the Babylonians and the Medes in one of the most precipitate falls of any empire in history.

abandoned Memphis, which was occupied by the Assyrian Army after a short siege that Esarhaddon claimed lasted only half a day on the 22nd day of that month. The description of the city's subsequent fate is couched in the standard trope employed by the annalist: 'Memphis, his royal city, in half a day, with mines, tunnels, assaults, I besieged, I captured, I devastated, I burned with fire. His queen, the women of his palace, Ushanahuru, his 'heir apparent', his other children, his possessions, horses, large and small cattle beyond counting, I carried away as booty to Assyria.'

As Esarhaddon had no intention of staying long in Egypt, he moved quickly to appoint Assyrian officials to stand at the side of the native rulers whom he reappointed to the many princedoms that constituted Lower Egypt. As for himself, he was proclaimed as the king of both Upper and Lower Egypt – a grandiose albeit hollow title, for no sooner had he returned to Assyria with the bulk of the army, with some left to aid the new governors in exercising their authority, than Taharqa returned to Memphis and Lower Egypt in a bid to secure the kingdom and eject the Assyrians. Assyrian control of Lower Egypt was shown for what it was – tenuous at best. It could be argued that here for the first time we really do begin to see the evidence of imperial overstretch – notwithstanding the fact that in securing Lower Egypt, Esarhaddon had brought the Assyrian Empire to the zenith of its geographical extent.

But as for the king himself, he may very well have viewed this as a hollow achievement once he became aware that there were attempts by differing groups and individuals in Nineveh and two other of Assyria's great cities to unseat him. It would seem the king had gained knowledge of these via an extensive domestic intelligence network, the existence of which suggests that Esarhaddon had never forgotten the manner whereby he had to secure his

OPPOSITE TOP

The reigns of Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal saw Assyrian military expeditions against the Arabs in their desert settlements. This image dates from the reign of Ashurbanipal and shows Assyrian cavalry and infantry chasing Arabs on their camels who are trying to escape. Esarhaddon secured the help of a number of Arab tribes for his later invasion of Egypt. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

OPPOSITE BOTTOM

This image is based upon a section of the relief shown above it. An Assyrian cavalry lancer from the reign of Ashurbanipal – notable for the leather worn by the horse – is attacking two Arab tribesmen on their camel. The latter are very poorly armed. It would be a mistake to think that all the territory called 'the desert' by the Assyrians was sand, since much of the terrain was of hardened gravel over which their horses could travel quite easily. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)

throne. Furthermore, the continuing existence of such opposition operating in the shadows suggests that he was still regarded by many in the land and in high levels of the nobility as a monarch of dubious credibility. Nonetheless, these incipient conspiracies were firmly scotched, with many of those involved, or even those tainted by dubious association with the actual conspirators, 'done away with by the sword'.

No sooner had the king dealt with this upsurge of conspiracy than he received the news that Taharqa had returned to Lower Egypt and was moving to eject his forces there. As the year 669 BC began, steps were undertaken to organize a new campaign force to return to Egypt. It was shortly after leaving on this new expedition, that Esarhaddon, never a man who benefited from robust health, fell sick and died in Harran.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ASHURBANIPAL, 668–?627 BC

When news of the death of Esarhaddon arrived in Nineveh, the succession, long prepared for, was duly enacted and Ashurbanipal crowned as the new King of Assyria. Thus, the arrangements made by Esarhaddon came to pass, although it would be another year before Shamash-shum-ukin was officially crowned as king of Babylon. This was not before the queen mother, the powerful Naqia, had required a further oath from him that he would stay loyal to his younger brother, a matter perhaps suggestive that even at the outset of the new reign all was not well with the arrangement that their father had drawn up. From the start, Ashurbanipal had seen his role as superior to that of his brother, seeing Shamash-shum-ukin's role as merely that of a figurehead in Babylon. This was not a perception that the latter willingly accepted, and one which became more onerous over the years. Nonetheless, even in the face of what we know to have been growing antipathy in the years ahead between the rulers in Nineveh and in Babylon, it would take 16 years before this sibling antipathy would explode into a bloody civil war.

OPPOSITE

Ashurbanipal is seen here in his command chariot, pulled by 'great horses', on campaign in Babylonia where the Assyrian Army was fighting to put down his older brother's rebellion against him. Although damaged in places, the different registers on the relief benefit from examination through a magnifying glass, as there is much going on their four levels. The image is set in a plantation of date palms and alongside a large irrigation canal *c.*650 BC. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

OPPOSITE

Coming to the throne in 668 BC, Ashurbanipal reigned for *c.*41 years. He is best known as the creator of the large cuneiform library discovered at Nineveh by H. Layard in the mid-19th century. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

The new monarch who now sat on the throne and exercised rule over the empire of Ashur was in many ways quite different from his predecessors. While Assyrian kings were always inclined to trumpet what they perceived to be their great virtues in their inscriptions, on a large tablet now in the British Museum we find Ashurbanipal treating us to a description of his education and training that clearly evidences not only his high opinion of himself but also the way he saw himself as especially favoured by the gods. Ashurbanipal also displayed some very negative personal characteristics. He was a malicious and vindictive individual and these aspects of his behaviour will be seen at work later in this section.

He was in all probability the best educated and possibly the only literate monarch to occupy the Assyrian throne. Of all the abilities he displayed, the one of which he was most proud was his ability to read Akkadian and write it in the cuneiform script. He even saw fit to communicate this expertise in the relief images of his various hunting scenes, which are possibly the very finest examples of this particular art form executed during the later empire. On one of these Ashurbanipal is seen galloping on his mount and employing a bow to shoot arrows into a herd of wild asses. A writing stylus can clearly be seen protruding from his cummerbund, a detail that the king would have insisted that the artist render quite clearly.

He also tells us that: 'Marduk, master of the gods, granted me as a gift a receptive mind and ample thought. Nabu, the universal scribe, made me a present of his wisdom. Urta and Nergal endowed my body with strength, vigour and unrivalled power. The art of the Master Adapa I learned – the hidden treasure of all scribal knowledge… I have read the artistic script of Sumer and the dark Akkadian, which is hard to master, taking pleasure in reading of the stones coming from before the flood… this is what I have done all of my days.'

The latter comment is perhaps an oblique reference to the very many cuneiform tablets that he had ordered scribes and scholars to collect from all over Babylonia and then brought to Nineveh, where they were read then stored in what has since come to be known as 'the Library of Ashurbanipal'. This mass of cuneiform tablets was recovered in the mid-19th century by archaeologists from the ruins of the royal palace in the Kouyunjik mound at Nineveh, and has become, albeit unknowingly, his greatest bequest to history.

Nor was it just literacy he addressed, because he also mentions that he had 'studied the heavens with the learned masters of oil divination, I have solved the laborious problems of division and multiplication, which were not clear.'

It is these intellectual attributes and skills that have led to him being called the scholar-king. Nor was he remiss in relating his other preparations for kingship. As with all crown princes of Assyria, he was thoroughly trained in the arts of war: 'I mounted my steed, I rode joyfully… I held the bow, I shot the arrow, the sign of my valour. I hurled heavy lances like a javelin. Holding the reins like a driver, I made the wheels [of the chariot] go round. I learned to handle the *aritu* and *kababu* shields like a heavy-armed bowman [probably a reference to an armoured bowman of the *kisir sharruti*].'

And yet for all his references to his military training, Ashurbanipal tended to leave the leadership of 'his' military campaigns to his magnates, all the while claiming credit and attributing the successes to himself. Whether he led his military campaigns or not, the Assyrian Army was fully engaged for many years of Ashurbanipal's long reign and by its many operations raised the empire to its zenith in power and prestige. However, in the wake of this last 'great' king of Assyria's death in *c.*627 BC, barely a quarter of a century would elapse before the empire's collapse.

BACK TO EGYPT

The first problem facing the new king was the uprising against Assyrian domination in Egypt. The pharaoh Taharqa had returned from the south and retaken Memphis and had attacked the Assyrian garrison stationed there. In this, the very first campaign of the new reign, albeit two years after coming to the throne, Ashurbanipal dispatched his *turtanu* at the head of the Assyrian force while he remained in Nineveh. In the process of its march down the Mediterranean coast the army was joined by soldiers drafted from 22 kingdoms linked to Assyria by treaty, including Syrians, Phoenicians and Cypriots and, once having arrived in the Delta region, Egyptians.

The Assyrian arrival in Egypt and advance on Thebes was uncontested. It was to the south of the city at a place called Kar-Baniti that a battle took place against Taharqa's army which the Assyrians won, prompting the pharaoh to abandon Memphis and retreat down the Nile to Thebes in Upper Egypt. The Assyrians now prepared to follow, rounding up as many vessels as could be found to transport the troops, and this expedition had actually cast off and was moving south when news came of a revolt in the Delta. According to Ashurbanipal's records, the kings of the Delta: 'plotted insurrection, following their own counsel… saying "They are driving Taharqa out of Egypt, how can we remain?" To Taharqa, king of Ethiopia, they sent their couriers for the

BELOW

The first major campaign of Ashurbanipal's reign involved the dispatch of an army under the *turtanu* to supress the revolt in Egypt. This led to the capture of the capital of Egypt, with Memphis falling within a day to siege. The trawl of human and material booty was huge, as can be seen here. Many of the Egyptian warriors were Nubians.
(© The Trustees of the British Museum)

purpose of swearing fealty… Against the Assyrian troops, my royal host, which I had stationed in Egypt… they planned evil.'

But these same troops got wind of the Egyptian plans and acted to forestall the plot. 'They seized the kings and bound them hand and foot'. Nor did the people of the cities these 'kings' ruled escape unscathed: 'And the people of Sais, Pintiti, Si'nu and the rest of the cities, as many as had joined with them in plotting evil, they struck down with sword, both great and small – not a man among them escaped. Their corpses they hang on stakes, they stripped off their skins and covered the city walls with them.'

The manacled kings were deported to Assyria and of their number, only one, Necho, survived. Ashurbanipal tells us: 'I spared his life and laid an oath, more drastic than the former, upon him. I clothed him in splendid garments, laid upon his neck a golden chain… I sent him back to Sais, where my father had set him up as king, and Nabu-shezibanni his son I set over Hathriba. I showed him even greater favour than my father.'

Ashurbanipal's presumption that Necho was now 'his man' in Egypt and that Assyrian rule in Egypt was once again established was to be disappointed, although four years were to elapse before the flag of rebellion was once again raised in Egypt.

The death of Taharqa was followed by the succession of his nephew Tantamun, who now took up the mantle of rebellion. In 674 BC he moved north from Nubia with his army and entered Thebes to the evident delight of its populace. Shortly thereafter, the Egyptian forces moved north with the intention of 'liberating' Memphis. An attempt by Egyptian troops under the command of Egyptian kings loyal to Assyria to block the advance was defeated, one of the consequences of which was the death of Necho. Tantamun then attempted to capture the Delta region but his efforts were defeated.

The arrival of a messenger in Nineveh conveying this news saw Ashurbanipal rapidly raise an army which was dispatched post haste to Egypt in 663 BC. We are not told how long this took or indeed how large this force was, but on receipt of the news that this new Assyrian Army was coming, Tantamun abandoned Memphis and began a retreat to the south of the country. That the Egyptian pharaoh received this news quite late is implied by the Assyrian assault on his withdrawing army, which was roundly defeated. This opened up an uncontested advance for the Assyrians on Thebes, which was rapidly captured 'in its entirety'. This ancient city and all its wealth was now given over to the Assyrians to ransack and despoil. Known to the Assyrians as Ni', Ashurbanipal lists the booty of Thebes as follows: 'Silver, gold, precious stones, the goods of his palace, all there was, brightly coloured and linen garments, great horses, the people, male and female, two tall obelisks made of shining electrum whose weight was 2,500 talents [approx. 38 tons each] which stood by the gate of the temple, I removed from their positions and carried then off to Assyria. Heavy plunder and countless, I carried away from Ni'.'

Such was the level of destruction of the city that Thebes never recovered. The event itself marks the absolute apogee of Assyrian conquest. Egypt thereafter posed no problem to Assyria and continued to pose no threat until the retreat of its occupation forces there in the mid-650s BC.

Even as Ashurbanipal's 'second campaign' was under way against Egypt, what he labelled as his 'third' was also being directed against the Phoenician city of Tyre under its ruler Ba'al, with the Assyrian monarch participating in the operation himself. The Assyrians were usually reluctant to directly intervene with these trading port cities that provided so much largesse, particularly the silver and other metals needed to satisfy the voracious Assyrian appetite for resources. Nonetheless, Ba'al of Tyre sufficiently provoked Ashurbanipal that he acted against him and his city. We are told by Ashurbanipal that the sin he committed was to ignore 'my royal command and did not obey the word of my lips'. The ruler of Tyre seems to have been his own man, recalcitrant and not easily intimidated by Assyrian threats. In 671 BC military action had been taken against him, which had led to the city suffering local territorial losses, but that did not serve to bring the Tyrian king into line. Whatever it was that finally pushed Ashurbanipal into acting against him we do not know, but we have the Assyrian monarch telling us that 'he threw up earthworks' against Tyre even though he also says it 'dwells in the midst of the sea'. Ashurbanipal states that 'he pressed them sorely and made their lives miserable', the upshot of which was that Tyre surrendered and submitted to the Assyrian yoke. And although the Assyrian monarch took Ba'al's daughter and his brother's daughters to serve as concubines along with large dowries, he nonetheless not only gave him back his son and heir but permitted him to remain on the throne of Tyre and eschewed the opportunity to annex the city.

ANATOLIA, THE NORTH AND THE NORTH-WEST

Emerging as an even larger potential problem for Ashurbanipal than for his father was the way the Cimmerians were threatening many of the local powers in Anatolia. By the 650s BC, the Cimmerians had successfully unified and in consequence become an immensely more dangerous threat. City-states to the east and west in Asia Minor, including even Lydia, now realized that the Cimmerians had ambitions that included the conquest of their own territories.

In consequence, local powers that had formerly seen themselves as opposing Assyrian rule in this part of the world and had taken every opportunity to 'cock a snook' at the warriors of Ashur and its kings, such as Mugallu of Tabal and others, now scrambled to ingratiate themselves with Nineveh in the desperate hope that Ashurbanipal would be willing to employ his army to extend his protection to them. Nor were they blind to Assyrian victories in Egypt and Ashurbanipal's suppression of Tyre, and in the period after these events the court at Nineveh was replete with offers of friendship from formerly

recalcitrant states in Anatolia. Ashurbanipal must have experienced more than a degree of *schadenfreude* when: 'Mugallu, king of Tabal who had addressed words of enmity to the kings, my fathers, brought a daughter, the offspring of his loins, with a large dowry, to Nineveh, to serve as my concubine and he kissed my feet'.

As did Sandasharme of Hilakku, who likewise had not submitted: 'to my fathers. Who did not bear their yoke'. He too brought a daughter to serve the king in his bed. In addition, many rulers 'who dwelt in the midst of the sea' came to Nineveh and there kissed the feet of the king. And last but not least, a representative from Gyges, king of Lydia, from far to the west, arrived with a message. He claimed to have received a message from Ashur in a dream in which the god of Assyria had told him to 'Lay hold of the feet of Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria and conquer thy foes by calling upon his name'. While accepting whatever gifts Gyges had sent Ashurbanipal did not extend the help requested. Indeed, the Lydian was in the short term the agent of his own salvation, as his fortunes against the Cimmerians improved. It was, however, temporary, for some time between 652 and 645 BC the Cimmerians overran Lydia and Gyges was killed. His son, according to Ashurbanipal, managed to establish good relations with Nineveh. Although the Cimmerians chose not to attack Assyrian interests in Anatolia, Nineveh was still very wary of their future intentions and kept a permanent eye on their movements, as from 657 BC onwards there was a definite perception that the Cimmerians were threatening Syria.

ELAM AND BABYLONIA

It was against the backdrop of the above events that there was an ongoing but slow deterioration in relations between the courts of Nineveh and Babylon. But before this translated into open conflict, Ashurbanipal found himself having to deal with Elam. In the first year of his reign, the amicable relations established between Elam and Assyria under his father continued. This even led to Ashurbanipal supplying grain to Elam, which was in the grip of a famine. But even this was not enough to prevent a resurgence of the traditional rivalry between the two, as Urtak, the king of Elam, could not resist taking advantage of the bulk of the Assyrian Army being in Egypt in 664 BC to launch an opportunistic invasion of Babylonia. The territory was quickly overrun, leading to the Elamite Army laying siege to Babylon itself. Ashurbanipal was able to put together a sizeable force which marched southwards into Babylonia, prompting the Elamites to abandon the siege forthwith and retreat, with their tails between their legs, to Elam.

Three years later hostilities broke out once more, on this occasion being prompted by the seemingly perennial internal squabbling in Elam over who was to occupy the throne. A certain Teumman, a royal cousin of the deceased Urtak, seized it, prompting the sons of the former king, whom the usurper had tried to have killed, and their families to escape to Assyria and beg sanctuary in Nineveh. This was a sizeable body of persons amounting to no fewer than five princes and 60 other members of the Elamite royal family. Ashurbanipal received an application from the new king for them to be returned to Elam, but that was refused.

The upshot of all of this was that in 653 BC, some years after Teumman had usurped the throne, the Elamites aided by the Aramaean Gambulu tribe attacked Assyria. Ashurbanipal was in Erbil when he received the news. Having received a favourable oracle from Ishtar, the Goddess of War, he dispatched an army – once again under a magnate, most probably the *turtanu* – southwards into Elam itself. A major battle was fought at a place called Til-Tuba. The Elamite king Teumman and his son were both killed, with an Assyrian soldier carrying the decapitated head of the former king back to Nineveh post haste.

Upon its receipt, the vindictive nature of Ashurbanipal referred to earlier was clearly on display, as he supposedly spat on it and slashed at it with a knife. Ashurbanipal and his queen are also shown relaxing in the garden of their palace, drinking wine, while to the left rear of the relief can be seen the head of the dead Teumman hanging from a tree by a large ring protruding from his mouth and neck.

Although the Assyrians did not pursue further operations within Elam, Ashurbanipal ordered his army to move into Gambulu and devastate it. Formerly a vassal state of Assyria, it had broken away and sided with Elam and had participated in the earlier attack on Babylonia in 667 BC, so it was time for punishment. The capital of Gambulu was destroyed, its population 'slaughtered like lambs'. Its king Dunanu was captured and dragged back to Nineveh in shackles, where he was put on display to the people of the city with the by-now-rotting remains of Teumman's head hanging from his neck. Ashurbanipal's solution to the Elam problem was to divide the realm in Assyria's interest: 'Ummanigash, son of Urtak the king of Elam who had fled from Teumman to Assyria and laid hold of my feet, I took with me to Elam. I placed him upon the throne of Teumman. Tammaritu, his third brother, who had fled with him, I set up as king in the city of Hidalu.'

If Ashurbanipal believed he had solved the problem of Elam by this device, he was to be sorely and very quickly disappointed.

It would seem that even as the army was dealing with Elam, the Assyrian grip on Egypt was faltering, a consequence of yet another rebellion that

successfully ejected the Assyrian garrison. That it was some time in the planning is indicated by its instigator, one Psammetichus I – thought to have been a son of Necho – successfully recruiting mercenaries from Caria and Ionia supplemented by troops provided by Gyges of Lydia. It was with these mercenaries, allied to native Egyptian troops, that Psammetichus of Sais, known to the Assyrians as Tushamilki, was able to successfully eject the Assyrian garrison stationed in the Delta region, with the survivors being chased all the way back to the border with Philistia.

It is always difficult when analysing causes and consequences to pin down when the fortunes of any empire tips over from success into decline. It is however generally acknowledged that is with this event that the first crack appears in the imperial Assyrian edifice. The process of decline can be prolonged, as can be seen with other empires. However, the fall of an empire can be both dramatic and rapid, and this was to be the fate of Assyria.

Whereas on previous occasions rebellion in Egypt had prompted a rapid and significant military response from the Assyrians, on this occasion Ashurbanipal was simply unable to do so. And it was this inability, rather than a lack of will to do so, that is seen by many commentators as the first evidence of Assyrian decline. It had always been the policy of the Assyrian state to respond with alacrity to any attempt of a foreign city-state to repudiate their vassal status. Assyrian acquiescence in such an event would merely prompt others to follow suit. In terms of the mechanics of the suppression of rebellion, the army was the instrument to effect it. But the Assyrian state, though militarily immensely powerful, could normally engage only in one major campaign at a time. And in the case of the rebellion in Egypt it was simply no longer possible for the Assyrians to dispatch an expeditionary force of sufficient size to defeat the rebellion. With the bulk of the Assyrian Army committed to dealing with Elam, and shortly thereafter also to a ferocious civil war in Babylonia, Ashurbanipal was compelled to 'write off Egypt'. Egypt was sacrificed to the need to control Elam and before long Babylonia as well – the control of which was by far and away Assyria's primary imperial concern. It is in these years, 660 through to 648 BC, that the fortunes of Assyria began to decline. This was the case even though there were to be several years thereafter in which Assyrian arms continued to triumph in its campaigns.

THE BABYLONIAN REVOLT

Esarhaddon's arrangement to prevent problems from arising with the succession following his death was successful, as it saw Ashurbanipal become king of Assyria and his older brother, Shamash-shum-ukin, king of Babylon. However, we do not know whether his design also laid down the lines of

demarcation between the respective sovereignties of Assyria and Babylon, and the fact that it was this matter that lay at the root of the antipathy that grew up between the two kings in the following 16 years before sibling rivalry exploded into full-scale and bloody civil war suggests that it did not.

For the monarch of Babylon, the manner in which his younger brother exercised authority over his domain must have increasingly grated – Ashurbanipal saw his brother's role as essentially ceremonial with little or no autonomy. Almost from the outset, the Assyrian monarch either seemed insensitive to his brother's concerns or he chose deliberately to demean him in the way he dealt with issues to do with Babylon. This is certainly suggested by the delay in his confirming Shamash-shum-ukin as king of Babylon, as if to reinforce his lesser status, with the dead Esarhaddon still being recorded in the Ptolemaic Canon as 'king in Babylon' in the year-long interregnum. The Assyrian king also seemed oblivious to the manner in which, for example, he failed to come to Babylon's support when the Elamites invaded in *c.*664 BC, delaying a response until 653 BC. Nonetheless, Ashurbanipal claimed to have treated his brother well, and that: 'every imaginable thing that kingship calls for, I made and gave him; soldiers, horses, chariots, I equipped and put into his hands; cities, fields, plantations and the people who live therein, I gave in large numbers'.

Interestingly, this short passage is prefaced with the Assyrian monarch stating that he 'had set [him] up as king of Babylon' rather than their father, Esarhaddon. Ashurbanipal also asserted his authority over all matters to do with foreign and religious affairs. Nor was Ashurbanipal oblivious to the continuing problems generated within southern Babylonia by the recalcitrant and aggressive Chaldaeans and the continuing support they always seemed to obtain from the Elamites. Keeping this problem under control required Assyrian military units to be continually stationed within the country, much to the chagrin of Shamash-shum-ukin, as his brother never deemed to consult him on the matter.

As far as religious affairs are concerned, there are numerous inscriptions detailing the repair of religious sanctuaries at Babylon and other cities with Ashurbanipal's name on them, but not his brother's. We also find officials in Shamash-shum-ukin's court bypassing the king and reporting direct to Ashurbanipal. It was no doubt through such contacts with the court in Babylon and other intelligence sources that Ashurbanipal knew by early 652 BC that his brother was moving towards initiating a civil war.

The signal for such came with Shamash-shum-ukin's closure of the gates of Babylon to the Assyrians. This prompted an appeal by Ashurbanipal to the populace of that city in late 652 BC: 'Regarding the empty words which this false brother told you, I have heard all that he has said. They are nothing but wind. Do not believe him… Do not for a moment listen to

PREVIOUS PAGES

A relief illustrating campaigning in Babylonia. Amid the date palms, Assyrian soldiers are shown carrying away booty and people from a sacked city. The survivors of a siege are being led away as deportees. The eventual destination of much of the booty and perhaps of the people was Assyria. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

his lies. Do not contaminate your own good name, which is unsullied before me and before the whole world, nor make yourselves sinners against the divinity.'

It was however to no avail. By the end of 652 BC Shamash-shum-ukin had acquired, according to his brother, a degree of support: 'he had stirred to revolt against me the people of Akkad, Chaldea, the Aramaeans, the Sea-land, from Akaba to Bab-Salimeti, vassals subject to me, also Umanigash [the Elamite]… along with the kings of Gutium, Amurru and Meluhha… and they joined forces with him. The gates of Sippar, Babylon and Borsippa he barred'.

Not all of those named entered into the conflict in support of Babylon apart from, inevitably, Elam and supporting Arab tribes. Assyria launched an invasion of Babylonia the following year, thus beginning a conflict that would not be resolved until seven years later. A short description of how events unfolded in the short term derives from two sources. That which is presented in normal text below is from the Babylonian Chronicle, while the shorter is from the earliest extant Babylonian Astronomical Diary entry and is interpolated in italics:

> In the month of Tebetu, the nineteenth day, Assyria and Akkad went to war. Slipping away from the enemy, the king [Shamash-shum-ukin] returned to Babylon. In the month of Addaru, the twenty-seventh day,
> *The army of Akkad and the army of Assyria joined battle together at Hiritu in the province of Sippar.*
> The army of Akkad stopped fighting, and a crushing defeat was inflicted upon it.
> *The army of Akkad retreated and suffered great losses.*
> A state of war was prolonged: there was a succession of battles.

Despite the major defeat experienced by the Elamite Army at Til-Tuba the previous year, it made an early intervention in support of Shamash-shum-ukin, and it was thoroughly defeated once again at a place called Mankisu, which is thought to have be near the modern site of Baghdad. Over the next

few months there were two major clashes between the Assyrian and Babylonian armies. The second of these at Khirit at the end of 652 BC was yet another major defeat for the latter. In 651 BC there were continuing clashes between Babylonian and Assyrian forces for the control of major urban centres. However, the important site of Nippur fell to the Assyrian Army towards the end of that year.

It was in the first half of 650 BC that the balance of the war began to swing more decisively in favour of Ashurbanipal's forces, with the investment of Babylon itself, which was placed under siege in the early summer. This succeeded notwithstanding the arrival of Arab troops of the Qedarite tribe to bolster the forces within Babylon. Other cities in the northern half of Babylonia, such as Cutha, Sippar and Borsippa, were also subjected to sieges. Nippur defected from the cause of Shamash-shum-ukin in early 650 BC to Assyria.

Fighting in the south of the country and in the Sealand had also been heavy, with Assyrian units contesting with Chaldaean tribal forces, the latter receiving much in the way of help especially at the beginning of the revolt from the Elamites under their king Humban-nikash II and his successor Tammaritu II. Elam was politically very unstable at this time and despite the demise of the former rulers, a new occupant of the throne, namely Humban-haltash III, also chose to join in the fight against Assyria. Of note is that the Chaldaeans were led by a grandson of Merodach-baladan – one Nabu-bel-shumati. But by the end of 650 BC, the Assyrians under the leadership of a Babylonian general named Bel-ibni who had been appointed by the Assyrian monarch were gaining the upper hand in the south.

A Babylonian document dating from four months after the beginning of the siege of the capital provides testimony of the brutal breakdown of even familial relationships among the besieged: 'At that time, famine and hardship were established in the land and a mother would not open a door to her own daughter'. Late in 649 BC another such document addressed the rapidly deteriorating conditions within the city, stating that famine was 'established' and that 'people were dying from lack of food'. Some months later, in the early spring of 648 BC another report alluded to the black market operating within the besieged city: 'At that time the enemy was encamped against the city; famine was established in the land; and the market rate was three litres of barley for one shekel of silver, purchased in secret'.

The Assyrian royal inscriptions also describe how the famine prompted the Babylonians to desperate measures:

> Instead of bread, they ate the flesh of their sons. [Instead of] beer, they drank the blood of their daughters. From lack of food, their limbs stopped working [and] they withered away; they became like corpse(s).

OPPOSITE

Babylonian prisoners are being brought forward to be viewed by the king in his chariot – off image with the heads of his chariot horses seen to the extreme right. At the bottom left scribes can be seen making a list of the booty to be transported back to Nineveh *c.*650 BC. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

> The faces of the people darkened as (if by) sm[oke] with depression and mourni[ng]. Plague, pestilence, illness and the chills reduced the people of the land of Akkad, all of them… The corpses of people were obstructing the street(s and alleys); they were blocking gateways. The silence (of desolation) lay over the city and (its) ruler; the deathly hush had been poured out.

Finally, after a two-year siege, the Assyrian Army finally broke into the city and Babylon fell. Shamash-shum-ukin, in order not to be captured by the vengeful Assyrians and dragged off to Nineveh, chose, it is said, to immolate himself in the flames of his palace. Other explanations have him being murdered or poisoned, but whatever the agency responsible for his death, Ashurbanipal was in no doubt that: 'Ashur, the god who created me, he determined for him a cruel death; he consigned him into a fire and destroyed his life'.

It has long been held that the worst of all wars are civil wars, and the Assyrian-Babylonian example was no different. There can be no doubt that it was indeed extremely bloody, with the Assyrian Army, while ultimately triumphant, incurring extremely heavy losses over its course. Nor was the conflict properly concluded with the fall of Babylon. Elam continued to support guerrilla actions in the south-eastern part of Babylonia and the Assyrians also had to contend with continuing opposition from the Qedarite Arabs. Ashurbanipal was not minded to forgive either party, and in 647 and 645 BC he launched campaigns against these enemies. The one directed against Elam bears all the hallmarks of imperial vengeance. Nonetheless, the cost to Assyria in blood and treasure incurred in securing victory must have been substantial, and notwithstanding the inevitable vainglory attending victory in the war it must have profoundly contributed to the weakening of the Assyrian state.

It also fell to Ashurbanipal to appoint a new ruler for Babylon, although there was no question on this occasion that the appointee would be a puppet ruler and be securely under Nineveh's thumb. In 647 BC, an

anonymous individual by the name of Kandalanu was acknowledged as the new king of Babylon. Much ink has been employed over the years in a bid to flesh out the character of this individual, but to no avail. Indeed, Babylonian documents have little to say about him other than in chronographic texts and date formulas in documents dealing with economic and administrative affairs. However, it is known he remained as ruler of Babylonia through to *c.*630 BC and the death of Ashurbanipal.

THE CAMPAIGNS AGAINST ELAM AND THE ARABS

Ashurbanipal was determined to find a resolution to the Elamite problem. This city-state had all too often seized the opportunity to both interfere in and support Babylon as Assyria had sought to impose its hegemony over the region. It was certainly a vengeful Ashurbanipal who launched two major campaigns against Elam – one in 647 BC and another the following year.

The first Assyrian campaign against Elam – noted by Ashurbanipal as his seventh – began in the month of Simanu, that is in May /June. The entrée into Elam for the Assyrian Army was the Aramaean territory in the east of Babylonia, and the 'cities' there chose to submit voluntarily to the oncoming forces rather than be destroyed. In consequence, Ashurbanipal lists six cities doing so in the face of what he called his: 'mighty battle array as I marched on Elam. The terrible brilliance of Ashur and Ishtar, my lords, and the fear of my majesty overwhelmed them'.

Although the king speaks of the people and their cattle 'rushing headlong to Assyria', a more reasonable inference is that they were deported back to Assyria.

Moving eastwards into Elam proper, the first major settlement the army came across was Bit-Imbi, described as 'an earlier city and stronghold of Elam' and which served as a defensive city on the eastern approaches to the kingdom. Ashurbanipal noted how it had been captured by his grandfather Sennacherib,

OPPOSITE

Assyrian soldiers doing what Assyrian soldiers did often and quite efficiently. Having captured a city, they killed many of the inhabitants and started deporting the survivors; other soldiers can be seen beginning the process of dismantling the city walls. This happened throughout the period of the empire. The uniforms may have changed but the process was always the same.
(Photo By DEA / G. DAGLI ORTI/De Agostini via Getty Images)

47 years before in 694 BC. He also captured it and because they had not greeted 'his majesty': 'the people dwelling therein… I slew. Their heads I cut off. I pierced their lips and took them to Assyria as a spectacle for the people of my land'.

The then king of Elam, Humban-haltash III, fled from Madaktu, his 'royal city', to the mountains. In his stead, Ashurbanipal placed on the throne the former king, Tammaritu II, but his occupation of it was only temporary as the Assyrian monarch deposed him for opposing the Assyrian Army's spoilation of Elam. Although Ashurbanipal also claimed in his Annals to have captured many Elamite cities and 'destroyed and devastated them', these were also said to have been reduced in the following year's campaign, and it may well be that the account was inflated by using the results of the following year's campaign.

For whatever reason, the Assyrians returned to Elam the following year, and on this occasion indulged in such an utterly destructive campaign that Elam essentially ceased to function as a significant power thereafter. Although Assyrian inscriptions are replete with the destruction meted out to enemy kingdoms, that inflicted on Elam seems to have been possibly the most destructive ever visited on an enemy kingdom by an Assyrian monarch. One senses behind this the extremely vengeful nature of Ashurbanipal's motivation – a final showdown with a long and very bitterly resented opponent.

Once again, the Assyrian Army, and the presumption must be that a substantial force was involved, invaded Elam from the west. It ranged over most of the Elamite kingdom, but the Assyrians were unable to bring the then Elamite king Humban-haltash's army to battle as he repeated his movement of the previous year and retreated to the mountains. Consequently, the Assyrians captured and destroyed a multitude of cities and, notwithstanding the use of the standard literary tropes employed to describe what they did, it is clear that the Assyrian Army went about its business with alacrity: 'Fourteen of his royal residence cities, together with countless small cities , and twelve districts of Elam – the whole of it, I captured, I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire. To mounds and ruin heaps I turned them. Countless warriors of his I slew, with the sword I cut down his mighty fighters'.

Ashurbanipal, who was present on this campaign, vented his spleen on the capital of Susa. Having ensconced himself in the royal palace, he ordered his troops to systematically strip it of all valuables, treasures and so forth: 'He had his soldiers destroy the temples and sanctuaries, pull down the ziggurat and set fire to the sacred groves reserved for secret rites'.

The statues of the gods were deported as part of the spoil back to Nineveh. His vengeance was not confined just to the living but also the dead: 'sepulchres of the earlier and later kings, who did not fear Ashur and Ishtar, my lords, and who had plagued their kings, my fathers, I destroyed, I devastated, I exposed

OPPOSITE

In quite a detailed image, mixed Assyrian troops can be seen while campaigning in Elam. It is noticeable in this case that the horses are quite small. One Elamite archer walks alongside the wheel of the chariot. The river that they are passing alongside is full of dead bodies of soldiers and horses. We know that after the end of this campaign many Elamite archers were introduced into the Assyrian Army. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

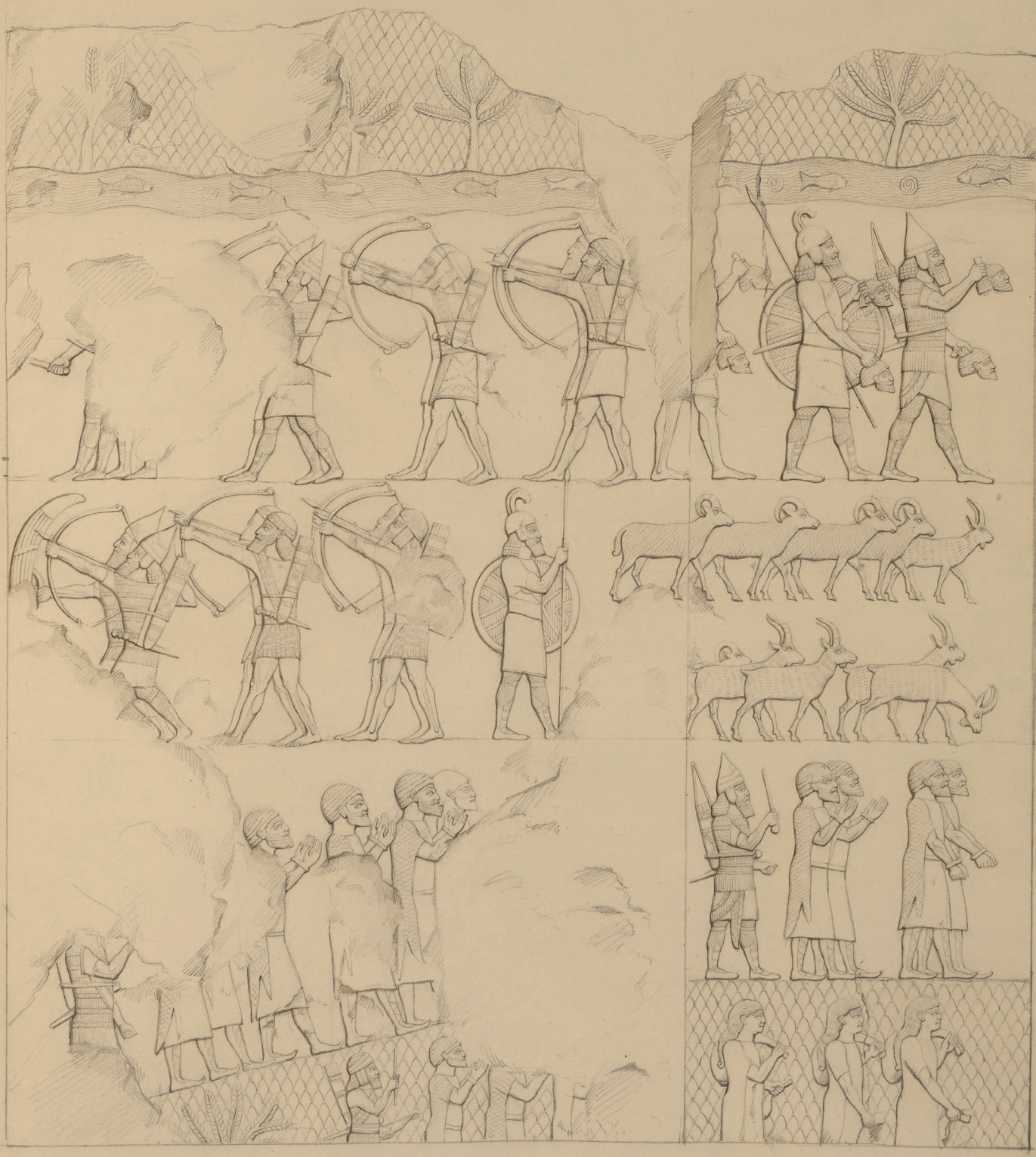
to the sun. Their bones I carried off to Assyria. I laid restlessness upon their shade. I deprived them of the food-offerings and libations of water'.

Furthermore, Ashurbanipal tells us in his Annals: 'For a distance of a month of 25 days' journey I devastated the provinces of Elam. Salt and *sihlu* (a plant/weed) I scattered over them… The dust of Susa, Madaktu, Haltermash and the rest of their cities I gathered together and took to Assyria. In a month of days I ravaged Elam to its farthest border. The noise of the people, the tread of cattle and sheep, the glad shouts of rejoicing, I banished from its fields'.

Many of the populace of the country were subsequently deported to Assyria along with members of the royal family and other families near to the Elamite throne, with most of these subsequently exhibited in the great parade that Ashurbanipal held in Nineveh to celebrate his triumph.

Only one enemy now remained, and Ashurbanipal was determined to 'punish' the Arabs for having supported the rebellion of his brother. The campaign he embarked upon is labelled as his ninth and indeed is the last that details military activity in his long reign. It was also the second of Ashurbanipal's campaigns against the Arab tribes. The first of these, dating back to 652 BC, had seen the Assyrian Army fighting against the Qedarite tribal leader Yuata, son of Haza'il who had revoked his covenant with Assyria. In battles ranging from southern Syria through to the Transjordan, the Assyrian Army defeated the Arab forces, but Yuata escaped, his request for asylum in Nabayatu denied. A certain Abiyate now assumed the leadership of the Qedarites and he agreed to a new treaty with Assyria. Such was the scale of booty taken back to Nineveh that Ashurbanipal boasted: 'camels were bought within my country for less than one shekel of silver in the market place. The workers received camels and even slaves as presents.'

The campaign of 645 BC was very distinctly punitive. Once again the object was the Qedarite tribe, who forwent their treaty with Assyria and supported the Babylonian revolt and even provided troops to help Shamash-shum-ukin in Babylon. The Assyrian Army embarked upon what was



Old Palace Kouyunjik.

Battle-scenes: Warriors carrying heads, prisoners and spoil.

OPPOSITE

A drawing copied from a wall relief illustrates elements of the Assyrian way of war. Archers are firing at battlements (off image to the left). People are being led away to be deported or killed. Animals too are being herded away for use as food on the hoof for the army. On the top right soldiers carry the decapitated heads of enemy dead so that the scribes can make a note of their trophies. Note the shield types employed by the troops. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

essentially a desert campaign and did so at the height of the summer, the thinking behind this being that despite the travails the Assyrian soldiers would encounter in coping with the ferocious heat of the desert, it was known that at that time of the year the tribes congregated at the oases to mitigate the worst of the summer excess. It was here that they were found by the Assyrian troops, many mounted on camels. The campaign extended from Palmyra through to al-Laga to the south of Damascus. The main Arab leaders were captured and sent to Nineveh, with U'aite (who had sent the troops to Babylon in the rebellion) being subjected to severe torture before being displayed for public consumption at one of the gates of the city, and the Arab leader A'yammu being publicly flayed. We know next to nothing of the second phase of Ashurbanipal's operation, which was directed at other Arab tribes in Arabia.

FROM 639 TO 627 BC – SILENCE

The reporting of the campaign against the Arabs marks the last occasion on which any account of military operations in the reign of Ashurbanipal is recorded. From the literary largesse of the 640s BC nothing is recorded concerning the events of the 630s BC down through to the death of Ashurbanipal in 627 BC. Very little is known about the monarch's final years in power, but it would seem the Assyrian Empire began a period of contraction in the face of a concatenation of factors.

Beyond the boundaries of the empire new enemies were impinging on the imperial power. The most familiar to the Assyrians were the Medes. They had forgone their tribal differences and unified under one king – a process forced upon them by the decades-long depredations of the Assyrians. The first king of the new Median nation was Phraortes, something not communicated to us by Assyrian sources but by the later Herodotus. Phraortes had attacked Assyria but was killed in the conflict, being succeeded by his son Cyaxares. We hear nothing of this people for nearly 30 years, as they were conquered by the Scythians.

ABOVE

Auxiliary troops from the early 6th century BC. Five wear the curved crested helmet so characteristic of neo-Hittite troops serving with the Assyrian Army, while the front three carry large shields of Aramaean origin.
(Photo by Werner Forman/Universal Images Group/Getty Images)

The Scythians subjected the Medes to the payment of tribute. They also crossed the Zagros Mountains in strength, raiding one after the other Assyria, Syria and Palestine, and pressed on to the borders of Egypt, where they were 'bought off' by the pharaoh Psammetichus, thereby turning them away from the Nilotic kingdom. Nothing of this is however recorded by the Assyrians, not that such a humiliating occurrence would have been, even assuming the scribes in Nineveh were still compiling the Royal Inscriptions.

There is also however the possibility that an evolving mega-drought, of which there is more to be said in the next chapter, had begun to make severe

inroads into Assyria, such that the impact on the agricultural economy of the state, as well as those of client states, which had been used to supplying their own produce to Assyria, profoundly impacted on Assyria's ability to continue to wage war and maintain its empire. If this was so, this is not likely something that would have been recorded in Ashurbanipal's Annals, being a matter that would have been interpreted as a judgement of the gods and reflect badly upon him. This is of course hypothetical but is a nonetheless credible explanation for the silence in the annalistic records. Such a catastrophe in the homeland would provide exactly the overarching causative factor that could account for the seemingly rapid demise of the empire that hitherto has always been so difficult to explain away.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE END OF THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE, 627–612 BC

Although the actual date of the death of Ashurbanipal cannot be determined with certainty, with some scholars arguing for 630 BC while others place it three years later, in 627 BC, we shall proceed on the assumption that it is the latter date that marks his demise. When, 13 years before, he had celebrated his triumph in Nineveh following the destruction of Elam, it appeared that Assyria was at the apogee of its power, with all its primary enemies having been vanquished. And yet, just 15 years after the death of this last 'great king of Assyria', the Neo-Assyrian Empire was gone – destroyed by the Babylonians and the Medes. As for what happened to account for this precipitous demise, we are still partially in the dark. The Annals of Ashurbanipal just come to an end, leaving us completely in the dark for the last 12 years of his reign. The reporting of the campaign against the Arabs marks the last occasion on which any account of military operations in the reign of Ashurbanipal is

OPPOSITE

Following the suppression of the Babylonian revolt, Ashurbanipal turned his attention to dealing with Elam. Frustrated by the continual interference of that country in Babylonia, he launched a major invasion which virtually led to its destruction. Here we see Elamite cavalry and chariotry in front of an Elamite city. Infantry can be seen in the lower register. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

OPPOSITE

This image shows the appearance of guardsmen of the *kisir sharruti* in the last century of the empire's existence. That on the left dates from the time of Sennacherib and is shown exactly like that of the heavy infantry deployed in the field. The task of guardsmen was to protect the palaces of the king, royal family and other high-ranking officials of the empire based in Nineveh. That in the centre is a guardsman from the reign of Ashurbanipal through to the end of the empire, and is distinguished by the remarkably large shield he is equipped with. This seems more for display than practical use. Walking towards us is an officer – identified by the small mace he carries in his right hand. He has eschewed his armoured corselet and helmet and is wearing his 'undress' uniform. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)

recorded. It is, however, the rapidity of the demise of the Assyrian Empire from its zenith in 670 BC to its end in 612 BC when the capital Nineveh fell to the Medes and Babylonians that still poses the greatest difficulty for historians to explain.

Ashurbanipal had been succeeded by his son Ashur-etil-ilani and he reigned for four years, though his rule was challenged by a second son called Sin-shar-ishkun. In Babylon, a usurper by the name of Sin-shumu-lishir declared himself king in the confusion following the death of the Assyrian puppet king of Babylon, Kandalanu, in *c*.627 BC. In that period, Sin-shar-ishkun also sat on the throne of Babylon following the usurper. It was at this time that civil war broke out between the two brothers, with the Babylonian Chronicle stating that: 'a state of war was prolonged; there was a succession of battles'. In 623 BC Ashur-etil-ilani was killed in battle and Sin-shar-ishkun became king of Assyria.

By that date, however, Babylon, and indeed the whole of Akkad, was slipping away from Assyria. That it could do so is perhaps indicative of a major decline in Assyrian military power. This permitted a certain Nabopolassar, a Chaldaean and king of the Sealand, to take over in Babylon. The Babylonian Chronicle dates the beginning of his reign to 626/625 BC, with 'the official date of his accession being the twenty-sixth day of the month of Arahsamnu', corresponding to 23 November 626 BC. It was not until 620 BC that Nabopolassar succeeded in controlling the whole of Babylonia, and up to that date the Assyrian king also claimed the title of king of Babylon. Heavy fighting continued between Assyrian and Babylonian forces over the city of Nippur, which was employed by the former as their main base in the region, and it is not possible to state with any surety when the Assyrian Army finally vacated the city.

Whatever the benefit of hindsight, there is nothing to suggest that Nabopolassar at that time envisaged the coming fall of Assyria. He probably

saw himself as yet another in the list of Chaldaean leaders who had acceded to leadership of Babylonia, for despite the problems Assyria may have faced at that moment, it was not realistic to think that he could secure the demise of the still-powerful northern kingdom. Having fought to secure what was assumed to be another temporary withdrawal, his assumption would have been at the time that the Assyrians would recoup their losses and make a return as they had done in the past.

That all changed in the next few years. With the demise of Elam, the Medes had emerged as the strongest power in the Zagros and beyond and Cyaxares, the king of this new unified power, and Nabopolassar became allies, with the king of the Medes agreeing to marry his granddaughter to the son of the Babylonian king, whose name was Nebuchadnezzar. This link with the Medes changed the military equation, and in 616 BC the Babylonians campaigned to the north and comprehensively defeated an Assyrian army at Balihu, followed up a few months later by yet another Assyrian defeat at

ABOVE

An image that represents the zenith of both Assyrian chariot design and of the cavalry. It is thought that the very large four-horse four-man crewed chariot may well have arisen as a consequence of the influx of numbers of 'large' horses into the Assyrian Army. The cavalryman in front of the chariot also represents the high point in the evolution of the heavy cavalry in the Assyrian Army, as witnessed primarily by the leather armour worn by the horse.
(Peter Horree / Alamy Stock Photo)

Arrapha in the homeland itself. These two defeats seemed to severely limit the capacity of the Assyrian Army to challenge the Babylonian Army when it marched north and began a siege of Ashur in 615 BC. However, the Assyrians did manage to push the Babylonians back as far as the city of Tikrit on the river of Tigris. It was now that the situation for the Assyrians became suddenly far more difficult when the Medes entered the fray. Coming down from the Zagros and using the same route, albeit in reverse, that the Assyrians frequently used in their campaigns, the Median Army took Arrapha and then moved farther west taking Tarbisu. From there Cyaxares laid siege to Ashur, which fell to the Medes in 614 and was thoroughly sacked. The Babylonians arrived just after the Medes had taken Ashur and concluded a treaty between them. A Babylonian source reported: 'the King of Akkad and Cyaxares met outside of the city and concluded a mutual accord and a total peace'.

The writing seemed to be clearly on the wall for Assyria.

CLIMATE CHANGE – A POSSIBLE EXPLANATION FOR THE FALL OF THE EMPIRE

It is arguably clear that climate change – in the form of long-term dessication – was the primary factor in the decline of the Middle Assyrian Empire and retreat to its heartland in what is now northern Iraq. It is only recently, however, that evidence has been published that suggests that this same culprit, albeit operating on a much longer timescale, may provide the underlying structural cause for the ultimate collapse of the Assyrian Empire in the 7th century BC. The team responsible for this evidence was led by Ashish Sinha of the Department of Earth Science of California State University and was composed of individual scholars from a variety of academic disciplines. The substance contained in this short box derives from a much longer and far more detailed article from the journal *Science Advances* in the paper 'Role of climate in the rise and fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire' published in 2019.

The article notes that the 'role climate change played in shaping the course of the Assyrian Empire… has been largely ignored despite the fact that the Assyrian heartland and its hinterlands comprised a region of high inter-annual precipitation variability and drought vulnerability'. Agriculture in Assyria was rain-fed, with most of the precipitation falling in the cool season from November through to April, with the crops being sown in October and November to take advantage of the rainfall. However, the heartland of Assyria also fell within what is known as a 'zone of uncertainty', wherein rainfall levels can vary 'typically between 40 to 60 per cent', in consequence of which 'rain-fed cereal cultivation is risky and unsustainable'. Where there are 'years of anomalously high and low rainfall, this agriculturally marginal zone shifts southwards and northwards by several hundred kilometres, rendering on the one hand nearly all Assyria's heartland both favourable to high-yield cereal cultivation, and on the other, to crop failures'.

Nor is this just a feature of Ancient Assyria (modern northern Iraq), as there are recent examples of this phenomenon dating to the periods 1999–2001 and 2007–08 when there were cereal crop failures and widespread livestock deaths across Syria and Iraq. These occurrences were the worst for some 50 years, a consequence of a 60 per cent decline in rainfall total over northern Iraq/Assyria. This resulted in attendant socio-economic consequences for a region already 'suffering from decades of political instability and unsustainable socioeconomic policies'.

Drawing upon a range of physical sources, the most important of which were stalagmites from caves in northern Iraq, and the study of the oxygen and

carbon isotropic data in the samples taken from them, it has been possible for the team investigating this matter to demonstrate that the period from about 850 BC and 740 BC was one of the wettest periods of the past 4,000 years. This peak wet period, 'termed here the Assyrian mega-pluvial (heavy humidity) was embedded within nearly two centuries (about 925–725 BC) and is synchronous with the prominent phases of Assyrian imperial expansion'.

But the same evidence also indicates that between 800 BC and 700 BC, that is, in the second half of the mega-pluvial period, the changes in rainfall totals were such that there was a definite trend towards the transition 'from peak pluvial to peak dry conditions'. This becomes greatly accentuated in the period from 675 BC through to 550 BC, which emerged as a 125-year period of peak aridity and is: 'thus synchronous, within the margins of dating error, with the period of the Assyrian Imperial collapse'.

Nonetheless, at the very beginning of his reign, Ashurbanipal in 668 BC was still able to claim that: 'Adad sent his rains, Ea opened his fountains, the grain grew 5 cubits tall in the stalk, the ear was five-sixths of a cubit long, heavy crops and a plenteous yield made the fields continuously luxuriant.'

This may well have been the case at the beginning of his reign, but it would not have been inconsistent with the emergence of more arid conditions as the 7th century unfolded. We are hamstrung generally by the silence that follows from the 630s onward in terms of Assyrian royal inscriptions, and it is entirely plausible that this period coincides with the onset of very severe drought conditions within Assyria and its hinterland. The mega-drought that hit Assyria and elsewhere continued beyond its fall and was estimated by the team to have been the worst to have afflicted the region in the last 4,000 years.

In the same fashion that the mega-pluvial conditions would have profoundly impacted the Assyrian agrarian economy, the onset of prolonged mega-drought conditions would have done so too. Supplies of flour available to the Assyrian Army in the period prior to 675 BC were substantial, benefiting from the mega-pluvial conditions in the heartland that resulted in quite exceptional crop yields. But with the onset of the great mega-drought, although we have no Assyrian sources that say as much, the opposite must have been the case. As the drought progressed, the total quantity of grain produced on an annual basis must have plummeted. Even the very extensive irrigation projects carried out during the reign of Sennacherib would not have been sufficient to alleviate the mega-drought – the consequences made even worse by the very large populations of the major late Assyrian cities.

Nor would it have been possible to secure alternative supplies from within the empire as: 'the Assyrian mega-drought occurred in the context of widespread regional aridity and as Assyrian agricultural production probably

reached maximum capacity, there were little means to import food from adjacent regions due to the friction of animal traction cereal transport.'

There must have been a return to the terrible drought and famine conditions of the end of the Middle Assyrian Empire, made worse by the much larger population of Assyria. This mega-drought would also have had an impact on the Assyrian ability to maintain the differing arms of its army. The availability of manpower for the army would have been seriously denuded as the population succumbed to famine. Even if, as is likely, the feeding of the army was deemed to be an absolute priority, this would have been impacted by the much-reduced crop yields. Furthermore, it would have been very difficult to supply the water needs of the very large number of horses that the Assyrian Army needed to equip the cavalry and chariot arms of the army because of the dessication of the countryside.

This also begs another question, as to whether the Median kingdom under Cyaxares, which had certainly been formed by the time of the late empire c.630 BC, still delivered horses to Assyria. Establishing his capital at Ecbatana, his rule extended over what were called the three 'Medias' running from Lake Urmia through the area of Tehran down to the land where the Persians were settled. He was also building an army of his own, drawing on the example of the Assyrian Army and the lessons learnt from the many decades of encountering it. The possession of a very large cavalry arm would no doubt have been a major feature of this Median army. This also implies that by this time the four Assyrian provinces on the Iranian plateau had been extinguished (they are not mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions after the reign of Esarhaddon) and subsumed within Median territory. Cyaxares would have no longer delivered horses to Assyria and the regular annual delivery of horses in large numbers was axial not only to the success of the Assyrian Army but to its capacity to function effectively. This, together with the impact on manpower in Assyria itself of the mega-drought and resultant famines, may account for the rapidity of the Assyrian Empire's eclipse.

Within the work of the team led by Ashish Sinha, which is based on extensive scientific evidence, we are offered the most credible macro-explanation for the Assyrian Empire's rapid collapse.

THE SACK OF NINEVEH, 612 BC

It was one year later, in the summer of 612 BC, that the allies made their move. With the Assyrian Army no longer able to deny them, the Babylonians and the Medes began a siege of Nineveh in the month of Simanu. This would be no easy

task as Nineveh was by that time the largest city in the world, its long walls punctuated by no fewer than 14 gates. Surprisingly, there is little coverage of the siege in Babylonian records of the event (unlike the Assyrians, Babylonian records rarely deal in any detail with military matters). However, archaeological excavations have revealed that the attackers were met with fierce resistance. Those carried out in 1989/90 revealed the skeletons of 13 individuals inside the Halzi Gate. 'Many of the skeletons were laying in one or another outstretched or contorted postions.' (D. Stronach) The ages ranged from 35 years down to an infant of just ten months old. The recovery of a sizeable number of arrowheads in the vicinity of the skeletons suggests that this was the means by which they had died. The east–west disposition of the arrow heads suggest that they were fired into the reduced entrance of the gate from the outside.

The length of the siege, however, was, when compared to Assyrian sieges of the like of Babylon or Arpad, quite short – lasting about three months. No doubt the attackers were aided in this by the immensely long walls of Nineveh, which would have made it difficult for the city to be defended around its full length. It is most likely that the Medes and Babylonians concentrated their assault on one or more gates – these being the weakest point in any fortified city. Excavations in the 1990s were undertaken at the south-eastern Halzi Gate. This was built in the reign of Sennacherib and was a substantial construction, being one of the three monumental gates built out of the total of 14 that gave access to the city. To its east was a moat which was also crossed by a large bridge.

Of particular note was a secondary construction to narrow the access via the gate into the city, although it was carried out on other gates in addition to that of the Halzi Gate. This seems to have been built in 614 BC following an abortive attack on the city, and this gate in particular. It was noted by the excavating team working on the site that there was a marked contrast between the quality of the construction and the materials used in the original structure of the gate with those employed subsequently in the narrowing of the entrance from the original 7m (23ft) to just 2m (6ft 6in.) by the employment of mud brick blocking. This substantially reduced the width and length of the gate access and was designed to enhance its defence. A similar modification was made to the Shamash Gate, the next one to the north from the Halzi Gate.

This work was ultimately to no avail as the city was finally stormed – as is suggested by a find of skeletons just within the Halzi Gate, comprising a few adult males, adolescent boys, two children and even a ten-month infant. As far as can be ascertained, none of the adult males was a soldiers. Given what we know of what happened to the population of besieged cities once the attackers broke in, what followed must have been a massacre. For the attackers, their actions were fuelled by the desire to wreak vengeance for the many years of pain, destruction and humiliation they had suffered at the hands of the

Assyrians. Hence the description in the Babylonian Chronicle of the city being turned into 'a heap of ruins'. Early archaeological excavations in the mid-19th and early 20th centuries revealed a 5cm (2in.) thick layer of ash indicating a major conflagration. Although Sennacherib's 'palace without rival' was torched, there was no wholesale destruction of the many wall reliefs spread throughout its numerous rooms. Those that were targeted had to do with those kings responsible primarily for the destruction of Babylon – namely Sennacherib, who comes in for an especial focus from Nabopolassar, who in a declaration of war on Assyria stated: 'I shall avenge Babylon. The property of Esagila and Babylon I shall bring down… the whole of Nineveh which is made of stone, by the command of Marduk, the great lord… I shall pile up like a mound of sand. The city of Sennacherib, son of Sargon, child of a domestic slave, conqueror of Babylon, plunderer of Babylonia; its roots I will pluck out and the foundations of the land I shall obliterate.'

Although some historians treat the fall of Nineveh as the end of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, there was some residual resistance, and it was not until 609 BC that the last named king of Assyria, one Ashur-uballit II, was defeated at Harran. Thereafter he, like the Assyrian Empire, disappears from history. Nor is it likely that there were many who mourned the passing of this great imperial power. For nearly three centuries it had dominated the Ancient Near East and held in thrall large numbers of city-states and immense numbers of people. However, for the peoples of the region, little was to change as the mantle of empire fell to Babylon, and for another 100 years the destiny of many kingdoms once dominated by Assyria now fell under the control of the kingdom of southern Mesopotamia.

And yet, for all that, there could not be any doubting the joy and happiness many must have felt on hearing the news of Assyria's downfall. Indeed it is likely that the sentiments of the Jewish prophet Nahum in Ch3 vs 19 in the Old Testament, albeit writing many years after the event, surely articulate the views of most of those living in Ancient Mesopotamia and beyond:

> All who hear the news of you
> Clap their hands at your downfall.
> For who has not felt
> Your unrelenting cruelty?
>
> Nahum 3:19

Sennacherib
The great king, the mighty king, king of the universe,
King of Assyria, king of the four corners of the world,
favourite of the great gods.
Ashur and Ishtar
Have given me an invincible weapon,
And have opened my hand for the destruction of the
enemies of Assyria,
Trusting in their great might,
I led my armies from one end of the earth to the other
And brought submission at my feet all princes, dwelling in
their palaces of the four corners of the world,
And they assumed my yoke.

Inscription from a stele from Nineveh

PART TWO

THE ARMY

[2490]

CHAPTER NINE

'THE INVINCIBLE WEAPON'

As can be seen in Sennacherib's declaration, the kings of Assyria were very mindful of the effectiveness of 'the invincible weapon' that existed in the form of the army they commanded. While it was never quite 'invincible', the Assyrian military was nonetheless the most effective in the Near East for over three centuries. Indeed, the Assyrian Army was responsible for the introduction of several significant innovations in warfare, the most important of which was the introduction of an independent cavalry arm. Despite the many omissions in the cuneiform record that do not permit us to better understand many aspects of the army and its organization and operation, it is nonetheless possible to reconstruct many elements of it.

The common depiction of the Assyrian Army is of a bloodthirsty, rampaging mass of soldiery – a product in the main of a cultural legacy fostered by the Bible. Certainly, the authors of the various Old Testament books, wherein Assyria makes a profound impact on the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, are not inhibited about expressing their antipathy towards its army. There is an element of truth in this depiction, and the Assyrians themselves did much to foster it by the harsh way they treated those perceived as rebels.

OPPOSITE

When in *c.*720 BC Sargon II captured Samaria, the state of Israel was extinguished. He related that he incorporated a number of Israelite units into the *kisir sharruti*. By virtue of their headdress it is believed that these two infantrymen – an archer to the left and a spearman on the right – are Israelites. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

However, the Assyrian Army was very much more than that – it could not have survived for three centuries, had it not been.

The Assyrian Army was a highly organized force characterized by a number of distinctive arms of service that integrated many specialist units. After 745 BC the elite troops that had long provided the king's personal guard were transformed into the standing army of Assyria – the *kisir sharruti* or the Royal Army, under the direct command of the monarch. These were professional soldiers – armed, fed and accommodated in one way or another by the state and highly trained. The army prior to 745 BC was composed primarily of native Assyrian troops with the many *sab sharri* – 'king's men' or 'king's troops' – as they were called serving in fulfilment of their *ilku* duty. After 745 BC, this obligation was applied to all those living in territories annexed to Assyria. This was implicit in a commonly used refrain employed by different Assyrian kings concerning the inhabitants of these annexed states: 'I counted them as Assyrians' and thus subject to *ilku* duties. *Ilku* duties were those all subjects of the King of Assyria were obliged to provide. By the later Assyrian period this was primarily service in the army.

From the reign of Tiglath-pileser III through to the fall of the empire, the incorporation of many different subjects within its borders saw the expansion of the army to embrace the soldiery from these former enemies. The Assyrian Army was organized on a territorial basis after 745 BC, and during the early imperial period the different social and cultural backgrounds of the army could clearly be seen in the appearance of those serving in its ranks. Those troops under the command of provincial governors were still known as 'the king's troops', and with the establishment of the imperial system therefore served throughout the empire.

At the height of the empire, the *kisir sharruti* expanded on a regular basis as more and more troops and units, be they infantry, chariotry, cavalry or specialist non-combat troops, were incorporated into its ranks. In search of a comparative analogy, it could be loosely likened to Napoleon's Imperial Guard, the elite of the *Grande Armée*. This grew over the years of the Napoleonic Empire until it was large enough to constitute an army in its own right. However, unlike the Imperial Guard, the *kisir sharruti* was rarely a mere spectator of a battle or a siege but always at the heart of any such. It provided the combat expertise to which the 'king's troops', whatever their ethnic origin, added numerical support.

This is in contradistinction to the many of those serving in the army of Tiglath-pileser III, who conscripted soldiery from city-states he had conquered, with these being primarily distinguishable from the native Assyrians again by their helmets. These carried a very distinctive curved crest and are thought to have come from those states conquered in northern Syria and southern

Anatolia – that is, the neo-Hittite city-states. That such troops wearing this type of helmet were still in service and serving in their original auxiliary status into the reign of Sennacherib can be verified by the discovery of a rare curved crest holder in the ground around the Tell of Lachish in modern Israel, which dates to the time of the Assyrian siege in 701 BC.

From the reign of Sennacherib onwards there was a determined attempt to see the army acquire a more 'uniform' appearance in terms of what was worn and the weaponry with which it was equipped. This was a long-term and ongoing process which reached probable fruition only in the reign of Ashurbanipal. Just taking one feature that had always marked out ethnic Assyrian troops – the wearing of the bronze and later iron conical helmet – it was only towards the end of the empire that this became a feature worn by nearly all troops serving in the army.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE NEO-ASSYRIAN ARMY

The primary structure of the neo-Assyrian Army was simple and remained fairly stable throughout the three centuries of the state and empire's existence. The structural changes from 745 BC onwards were related to innovations in the nature of the army, for example, the addition of new infantry types and the relative decline of the chariot arm. This section will attempt to illustrate the basic structure.

From Ashurnasirpal II to Tiglath-pileser II (*c.*883–745 BC), the army was structured as follows: regular infantry, heavy infantry, chariotry and cavalry. It was ethnically homogenous, being composed almost exclusively of ethnic Assyrians, although on occasions fleshed out with the temporary addition of the forces of client kingdoms. Although we have no visual evidence to support this assertion, it is reasonable to assume that changes which are detailed as beginning from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III in 745 BC had already begun to a limited degree prior to his accession. It is, however, undoubtedly the case that the Assyrian Army from 745 BC did see changes to its structure – it got larger with new troops introduced – although thereafter it remained essentially the same through the end of the empire in 612 BC.

Although the chariotry continued to exist until the end of the empire, the general understanding is that it declined substantially in numbers, importance and kudos within the army. This has been inferred by some due to the relative dearth of chariots seen in reliefs of Tiglath-pileser III, Sennacherib and through to the reign of Ashurbanipal (notwithstanding the appearance in the latter king's reign of the very large and heavy four-man chariot). By way of example,

on the wall reliefs of Sennacherib, there are no chariots that are depicted serving with the army other than that used by the king and the accompanying ceremonial chariots. Their place seems to have been taken by a hugely expanded cavalry arm. However, Sennacherib talks of his chariots in action during the course of the battle of Halule.

Basic Structure of the Assyrian Army, 745–612 BC

Infantry	Light	Auxiliary archers (Itu'aeans and Neo-Hittite) Auxiliary spearmen (Gurraeans and North Syrian)
Infantry	Regular	Regular archers Regular spearmen
Infantry	Heavy	Armoured archers Armoured slingers Armoured spearmen
Cavalry		
Chariotry		

COMMAND AND CONTROL OF THE ARMY

The supreme command and control of this army was vested in the king and thence in a tier of some 100–120 high-ranking individuals that formed the military and administrative backbone of the empire. These were called 'the magnates'. The term literally means 'the great ones' and they were appointed by the king. These individuals often wore many hats, being entrusted with overseeing a whole gamut of responsibilities as the supreme officers of the state. At the very highest level of the state there was no separation between civilian and military functions, with the magnates being entrusted with the execution of all tasks allocated to them by the king. These included court business, relations with the temples and their priesthoods, oversight of royal construction projects, administration of the provinces, diplomatic representation and the command of various bodies of troops in military campaigns.

It was, however, the very upper tier of magnates with whom the king consorted on matters of high state policy, including military strategy. The eight individuals who comprised this group also oversaw the administration of provinces within the empire deemed to be the most strategically vital. Although their titles still reflected the origins of their roles as high-ranking courtiers, they retained and were known by these titles even when serving on campaign. The exemplars given below date from the reign of Sargon II.

The commander of the Assyrian Army, or *turtanu*, oversaw the Harran region as its governor. Sargon also saw fit to appoint a second individual as a *turtanu,* with the former being designated the *turtanu* of the right, and the latter the *turtanu* of the left. This post was established in 708 BC with this individual having oversight of the provinces of Kummuh and Melid. It is likely that the creation of this second post of *turtanu* was brought about by the requirement to deal with the increased need of the army to respond to revolts and campaigns over the much wider geographical area the empire covered by the time of the death of Sargon II in 705 BC. When established by Sargon, the office of *turtanu* of the left was provided with the following military establishment: 150 chariots, 1,500 cavalry, 20,000 bowmen and 10,000 shield bearers and lancers.

It may also have been a device to remove any temptation on the part of the original, singular *turtanu* to employ the military should he have political ambitions. This was a matter that Sargon would have been acutely sensitive to, being a usurper himself. We have already seen how the *turtanu* could, if the central power was weak, usurp to a degree the prerogatives of the monarchy. Despite this concern, there were more than a few occasions during the 7th century BC, for example in the reign of Ashurbanipal, when the *turtanu* was charged by the king with the oversight of military campaigns when the latter chose for whatever reason to remain in the capital.

These concerns perhaps also explain the appointment of a eunuch to the post of *rab-sha-reshi*, or head of the *kisir sharruti.* In the same manner that the appointment of eunuchs as governors was to assure the king of their political loyalty, so too the appointment of one such as commander of the *kisir sharruti* could affirm the loyalty of this body of troops to the monarch.

The court treasurer was entitled the *masennu*. He was tasked with supervising the northern frontier with Urartu. To the north-east, the frontier in the territory next to that of the *masennu* was overseen by the *nagir ekalli* or palace herald. Both individuals had been involved in the military operations against Urartu and thus knew the region and the nature of the enemy.

Operating to the north-east or north-west of the *masennu*'s province was the *rab shaq,* or chief cupbearer. At this time he was also responsible for overseeing deportees.

Sargon also appointed his brother Sin-ahu-usur as *sukkalmanah* or grand vizier and made him the most powerful of all the magnates. This was a title created by Sargon specifically for his younger brother who had helped him gain the throne. Sin-ahu-usur commanded the king's elite 1,000-man cavalry bodyguard (*petal qurubti*) everywhere the king went on campaign and he played a prominent role in the 714 BC campaign in Urartu. There was also a *sukkalu* or vizier, and he also is known to have played a role in the campaigns in Urartu and Babylonia.

ABOVE

During the 9th and much of the 8th centuries BC the manpower of the Assyrian Army was drawn from the native peasantry serving their *ilku* service to the state. Their dress was very basic, as was their weaponry, as is the case with this light infantry trooper. He is armed with a composite bow and a long dagger/short sword. He is about to remove the head of the dead enemy whom he has killed with his bow. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)

Below this tier of the highest magnates were others who were governors/prefects – *shaknus* – of the other provinces. From the reign of Tiglath-pileser III in 745 BC many of these were eunuchs. In addition to their administrative roles in overseeing their provinces, when the word went out from the palace to do so they assembled the military from their province for the coming campaign. It is likely that those mobilized would have been in provinces in close geographical proximity to the coming theatre of war, with the role of the governor morphing into that of the military commander of the force that he was now charged with leading to the designated muster point for the coming campaign. This illustrates the decentralized nature of the Assyrian Army after 745 BC once the provincial system was in place and up and running. The major campaigns would be served by an army drawn from many provinces and coming together only at the designated muster point.

Troops of the *kisir sharruti* serving in the province were not normally under the command of the governor, but of the king. However, in the case of a provincial mobilization both the troops of the *kisir sharruti* and the 'king's men' serving there would have come under the command of the governor. Those serving in the north-west and north-east of the empire as well as in northern Syria may well have done so in strength, as these were areas where there were greater border tensions and frequent skirmishes with native forces. The size and strategic importance of the province would be the determinant of the size of the contingent that the governor would lead to the muster point. Smaller provinces would perhaps field a force of some 5,000 men, whereas the larger might bring 10,000 troops. They could have included chariot troops, cavalry, heavy infantry and possibly the auxiliary forces comprising Itu'aean and Gurraean archers and those that were drawn from the *kisir sharruti*. But in such circumstances as a provincial 'call-up' they would be subsumed by the *shaknu* with those troops raised by the *bitqu* or levy. The latter would be the 'king's men', that is the detachments of the army raised from those selected in their provinces and charged with fulfilling their *ilku* duties by serving in the coming campaign.

KISIR SHARRUTI

This 'army' within the army, also known as the 'standing army' or 'Royal Army', came under the jurisdiction of the *rab-sha-reshi* or chief eunuch. It was composed of equestrian and infantry units as well as supporting formations. These constituted the 'standing army' and thus the professional core of the Assyrian Army. In the main, albeit not exclusively, they were made up of ethnic Assyrian troops from the homeland.

The core equestrian units comprised cavalry and chariot units. From these, a number formed the horse guards and chariot guards of the king. There were two categories of these royal bodyguards. They were designated as either '*sha shepi*', meaning 'at the feet', or '*sha qurubti*', meaning 'close by'. The 1,000 *petal qurubti* that escorted Sargon II under the command of his brother formed part of the *sha qurubti*, and was made up of an elite force of handpicked men, and it is thought that it was recruited from the Assyrian nobility.

Other cavalry and chariot troops were raised from five major provincial cities of the Assyrian heartland and named as follows: *Ashuraia* for Ashur, *Arraphaia* for Arrapha, *Arzuhinaia* for Arzuhina, *Arbailaia* for Arbail, and finally *Armaia,* which cannot be identified with any one city. Alternatively, the five/six divisions of the Royal Army were named for gods of the Assyrian pantheon: Ashur, Adad, Nergal, Shamash, Sin and Ishtar.

In his muti-volume work on the Assyrian Army, Assyriologist Tamas Dezso has expressed the following view about the significance of these units. He says: 'The Nimrud horse lists list the officers and horses assigned to them. In addition to the bodyguard units, especially the cavalry bodyguard discussed above, the city units were probably the elite troops, the 'backbone' of the Assyrian Army. If the cavalry bodyguard was identified in the sculptures as cavalrymen equipped with lances and bows as well, it is quite reasonable to suppose that the city units might have formed the regular cavalry units, horsemen of which were depicted in the sculptures as lancers and mounted archers.'

The *kisir sharruti* also included heavy infantry, archers and slingers. These are covered in the general section on infantry. However, it is worth noting that heavy spearman of the *kisir sharruti* were in all probability those regarded as the elite force of the Assyrian Army.

THE INFANTRY

As with all militaries in the ancient world, it was the infantry that was the major arm of the Assyrian Army. While the ratio of foot soldiers to other arms such as the chariotry and cavalry did change over the three centuries of its existence, the central role of this arm of service never did.

The mass of the Assyrian infantry in the period from the beginning of the reign of Ashurnasirpal in 883 BC through to the demise of Ashur-nirari in 746 BC consisted of essentially conscripted native Assyrians. Subsumed within this identification are numbers of Aramaeans who had become assimilated and thus Assyrianized over the preceding centuries. It is not however possible to distinguish one group from the other as they all wore identical clothing and carried essentially the same arms and equipment. In almost all cases these infantry would have been individuals fulfilling their annual *ilku* obligation.

The Assyrian Army in this earlier period was then essentially a *corvee* army. The mass of ordinary infantry was drawn from the landed peasantry. These were hardy workers used to the sometimes-harsh climatic conditions of what is now northern Iraq, and as *ilku* was a requirement for all Assyrians, the responsibility to provide service to the state arose by virtue of their being Assyrian. Every year men would be called up for service in the army. This *bitqu* or annual levy would be declared in some or all the provinces of Assyria and fulfilled by those men eligible in fulfilment of their *ilku* responsibility. The criteria utilized in determining those who were selected would in all probability be no different from those employed to decide who would serve in any army, be it ancient or modern. Age, fitness, and mental acuity were judged, although this latter quality should not be over stressed. At the level of conscripts, a basic

ability to conform and understand orders would be the norm, although it must be assumed that an eye would be kept open for individuals of ability who might transfer after initial service into the *kisir sharruti.*

However, not all those 'conscripted' would serve in the coming campaign. It is thought that those who did served for the length of the campaign or for a year. These individuals were known as 'king's men'. Others, in all probability many who had already served, went into the reserve, and their task was to preserve security in their home provinces and also to be available should the need arise to reinforce the main army. This body was designated as the *sha kutalli* – quite literally meaning 'those behind'. Others found their way into the labour service and were employed on building projects. The extent of what constituted *ilku* service was diverse and complex and beyond the scope of this work to address. It is not known exactly for how long and under what terms these soldiers served.

THE INFANTRY OF THE ARMY OF THE 9TH CENTURY BC

As the army fielded by Ashurnasirpal II and his son was composed primarily of ethnic Assyrians, the depiction of them on the wall reliefs from Nimrud and the Balawat Gates show infantry that are lightly armed and equipped and those that are more heavily armoured.

The former, described as 'regular infantry', belong to the 'king's men' and are the conscripted peasants serving their *ilku* task, while the second are of the elite infantry and are part of the central standing army, and are thus professional soldiers. The former were not depicted on the wall reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II, nor on the Balawat Gates. Indeed, if this is the case then it seems of all the wall reliefs for all the kings of Assyria, as those soldiers in whatever branch of the army all derived from the elite troops of the central standing army or the *kisir sharruti.* The only exceptions were some of the auxiliary infantry, be they archers or spearmen employed in the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, who were not native Assyrians, but Aramaeans from the Itu'aean and Gurraean tribes and from the Neo-Hittite and Northern Syrian city states.

The regular infantry of the Assyrian Army from 883 BC onward, the beginning of Ashurnasirpal II's reign, and for most of the 9th and into the 7th centuries, wore no armour. Their basic clothing of a tunic, when worn, was unlikely to have been of a standard issue and indeed may well have been one that would have been worn in civilian life. These were in the main plain and made of wool, although some are seen with designs on the bottom of the 'kilt' section which add a splash of colour. It is not known whether these

represented some sort of unit marking. They are all seen on the reliefs wearing the distinctive bronze (later iron) Assyrian conical-type helmet. Almost all are seen wearing a large, standard-issue belt around the midriff, which, if made of bronze, was probably military issue and offered a limited degree of protection to the wearer.

Some of these regular infantry are seen with bows and others just spears, and it is probable that there were more bowmen than spearmen. As these soldiers were serving as part of their *ilku* duty and were in the main drawn from an agricultural background, they were probably brought up from an early age to use the bow to protect their fields, persons and villages from attacks by lions, wolves and other wild animals that still existed in large numbers at the time. The bow was also the prime weapon of use and it is likely that boys would have been brought up to use it by fathers and grandfathers who had served in the army themselves. The army would no doubt have assumed a certain level of skill in this weapon. The regular infantry on Ashurnasirpal's reliefs and the Balawat Gates of Shalmaneser III are all equipped with a varied range of shield types, and some are carrying daggers. These are the troops that formed the bulk of the Assyrian Army's infantry forces.

The heavy infantry of the standing army were fewer in number and stand out by being heavily armoured. They wore bronze (later iron) scale armour that covered the head and extended for the whole length of the body down to the ankles. This was worn in this period by both heavy infantry and chariot archers. This armour can best be seen in the colour image of such a soldier and in the images from the Balawat Gates. The conical helmet was also made of bronze. The cost of the manufacture of such armour would have been high and no doubt a dead warrior wearing such would have been stripped of it before burial, so that it could be issued again. This armour disappears from depictions of heavy infantry by 745 BC, which suggests that it was phased out as being much too heavy for effective combat use. Though it no doubt offered protection, the wearing of such a garment, and its weight – the material on which the scales were sown was probably made of leather, possibly of wool – in summer temperatures of over 40 degrees centigrade must have been a horrendous experience even for hardy Assyrian soldiers. This body armour is also seen on such infantry being employed as sappers, and a number are depicted in reliefs using wedge-shaped tools to lever away at walls of cities under siege where they have been constructed of baked brick. Whether or not these 'sappers' constituted a separate unit from the infantry, or were just individuals from the latter delegated to operate in this role when engaged in siege work, is unknown. The heavy infantry were equipped with the same types of bow as the regular infantry.

ABOVE

From the 9th through to the mid-8th century BC, elite Assyrian heavy infantry archers and chariot archers, armed with the composite bow, wore a very heavy long coat fastened by a wide belt reaching to the ankles. Attached to these long coats was scale armour, possibly of bronze and/or iron. These long armoured coats had ceased to be worn by the time of Tiglath-pileser. (Iunstream / Alamy Stock Photo)

When we next see infantry illustrated on reliefs, these cover the period from 745 BC onward in the reign of Tiglath-pileser III. And while the changes are quite distinctive, it is reasonable to suppose that such changes may have begun earlier than this. Notwithstanding the 'period of troubles', wherein we do not have much evidence of the goings on in the army, it seems reasonable to suppose that the Assyrian Army did reflect on the lessons of combat and make changes accordingly.

INFANTRY – 745 BC TO 612 BC

Auxiliary Infantry

The most important change in the army of Tiglath-pileser III seen from the illustrations in his reliefs is the appearance of auxiliary infantry – that is non-ethnic Assyrian troops – both archers and spearmen. These were drawn from the Aramaean tribes that had been conquered and recruited into the army by the king in his campaigns. They were clearly very effective, as is witnessed by the requests from governors for their services in preserving order and security in their own provinces. They also generated a reputation for ferocity among their enemies. Although these troops are first seen on reliefs dating from 745 BC onwards, they served with the army before that date. The Aramaean Itu'eans – this being their tribal name – perhaps the best known auxiliary troops, are first mentioned in cuneiform sources dating from the reigns of Tukulti-ninurta II and Shalmaneser III some 150 years before they are depicted on the reliefs of Tiglath-pileser III. They originated from settlements on 'the middle reaches of the Tigris River'. Also mentioned, albeit not as often as the Itu'aeans, are the Gurraeans, who were also Aramaeans and were recruited to serve with the Assyrian Army as auxiliary spearmen.

BELOW

Two ranks of armoured archers of the type described on pp. 197–98 can be seen behind the mobile siege engine on a register from the Balawat Gates. Wearing such heavy armoured protection must have been utterly exhausting in the very high summer temperatures of the Near East. It is likely that production costs allied to this led to its eventual demise within the Assyrian Army.
(Photo by: Photo12/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

The arrangement whereby they served was struck between the crown and the sheikh or head of the respective tribe to which they belonged – with such an arrangement being long term. Such an arrangement was also concluded with other Aramaean tribes, for example the Ruqahu, Hallatu, Iadaqu, Rubu'u and Litamu. These latter tribes are mentioned only infrequently, so their service may not have been so prolonged. Nonetheless, given that these auxiliaries were dependent on the crown for reward and security – we know that some archers were given 'bow fields' in return for service – and that they had no involvement with the Assyrian court, their loyalty to the king could be relied upon, which is why they fell under the personal oversight of the king.

Such was the perceived prowess of the Itu'aeans as warriors that their exploits commanded much in the way of coverage in the cuneiform texts in one way or another. On the battlefield the Itu'aeans served as archers, supplementing those of the ethnic Assyrian warriors, and when off it they also operated as *de facto* police in different parts of the empire. The impression gained from the correspondence of, for example, Sha-ashur-dubbu, the governor of Tushan, who had written to the king specifically requesting their service in his province, suggests that they could be relied upon to 'knock heads together' and solve problems with recalcitrant natives. They could be a handful to command, however, with some governors complaining about their lack of discipline and failure to respond to orders. They were also deployed in some numbers in forts guarding the imperial borders, and their importance can be seen in the example of Zamua where the total number of Itu'aeans and Gurraeans outnumbered the garrison of ethnic Assyrian infantry.

OPPOSITE

Auxiliary troops came to form a very important element in the Assyrian Army after 745 BC. The example here is better dressed and equipped than the first of these troops drafted by Tiglath-pileser III. Although many Aramaeans were used in this role, others were recruited from northern Syria and the Neo-Hittite kingdoms. The latter can be distinguished by the distinctive Neo-Hittite-type helmet and the form of shield they carried. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)

Auxiliary archers are depicted in some numbers on reliefs, with the greatest number appearing on those of Ashurbanipal in the 7th century BC. In the early depictions Dezso notes that 'we can scarcely find two auxiliary archers – with the exception of those depicted in the same scene – wearing exactly the same garment, quiver, headband and hair'. Being auxiliary troops they would have been employed 'as is', that is wearing the clothing, arms and equipment and hair styles they would normally wear, which was probably representative of their tribal backgrounds. This does not really change significantly through to the reign of Sennacherib. Although the clothing that they do wear becomes more colourful, most are still depicted bare-chested, albeit with cross-belts to hold the quiver and sword. Most are also depicted barefooted and in nearly all cases they are wearing headbands.

Auxiliary spearman are first illustrated in reliefs dating from the time of Tiglath-pileser III. As with the auxiliary archers they wear a cloth tunic, but unlike them they also wear a cross-band over the torso which supports a circular metal plate offering a basic level of protection to the heart and lungs. They are never seen wearing body armour. The most distinguishing feature of these warriors is their helmets. They are not modelled on the Assyrian helmet, but rather, it is thought, represent those traditionally made and worn in those areas from which they were recruited, and they are seen only on auxiliary spearmen. The most defining feature of this type of helmet is its very prominent crest in a number of styles. This is a distinguishing feature of auxiliary spearmen through to the reign of Ashurbanipal, although by this time the variety of crested helmets seen earlier on has been resolved to just one. It is thought that this type of helmet originated in the northern Syrian and south-eastern area of Anatolia and there is quite a degree of provenance to support this case in terms of archaeological evidence.

There is no question that from 745 BC onward, auxiliary infantry played an indispensable role in the Assyrian Army. The way they are depicted in the reliefs shows their use in multiple situations. When on the march they often formed the advance guard, where they were used for reconnaissance purposes to scout

ahead both to find sites for the army to encamp and to elicit the position of the enemy. They are also seen playing a significant role in sieges – often in the front row of assaulting troops and those climbing the scaling ladders. It may have been that as they were auxiliary forces, high losses amongst them in such roles was deemed acceptable – a polite way of saying that they were possibly viewed as 'arrow fodder'.

It was often the lot of the auxiliary infantry to escort those peoples being deported from their homeland to their new place of abode. The wide range of different roles in which they are seen merely serves to reinforce how important these troops became to the army. By the time of the reign of the last great Assyrian king – Ashurbanipal – they may well have still been referred to as auxiliaries, but in practice they were a permanent feature of the Assyrian Army.

Regular Infantry

The regular infantry formed the largest body of troops serving in the Assyrian Army throughout the period. Regular infantry serving in the armies of Ashurnasirpal and Shalmaneser III were, in the main, ethnic Assyrians. After 745 BC, those eligible males called up would also have included deportees to Assyria and the male inhabitants of the provinces outside Assyria, who were liable to the same *ilku* obligations as ethnic Assyrians. Recruitment was also extended to embrace captive soldiers. Service was seasonal – although we do not know for how long they were required to serve – and if they survived the gruelling campaign they would be returned to their farms, homes and families. Many troops were also employed in garrisons in the forts along the borders of the empire, serving in the provinces in which they were recruited.

Regular infantry are immediately recognizable from as far back as the reign of Ashurnasirpal in the 9th century BC by the distinctive Assyrian conical bronze (later iron) helmet. Three types of regular infantry can be discerned from the reliefs from the time of Tiglath-pileser III onward. There are those equipped with bow and spear and sword and shield, with the other

OPPOSITE

It is possible to discern the evolutionary trends in the uniforms and equipment of many types of Assyrian infantry in the reigns of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II. Although lightly armed, this native Assyrian served with the *kisir sharruti* as an elite foot guard. Although he wears no armour, the shield is of note, being a cone of leather embossed with bronze. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)

two types serving as either archers or spearmen. These three types of regular infantry are never seen wearing body armour, which was reserved for the heavy infantry. The regular infantry are depicted wearing short-sleeved, one-piece woollen tunics covering the torso and extending to the knees. In some cases, these are fringed at the bottom, while others have geometric designs woven into them. Whether or not they were coloured in different ways, and whether this was significant as unit insignia, is unknown. All are equipped with what is believed to have been a wide bronze belt that offered some degree of protection to the midriff as well as providing support to the lower spine during long marches. All are seen carrying swords. They are almost always depicted barefooted.

Regular infantry are shown using a wide range of shields made of different materials, with those carried by regular spearmen in the reign of Ashurbanipal being a lot larger and more sophisticated in design than those of their predecessors some two centuries before. It is quite reasonable to imagine those spearmen equipped with the large circular or nearly oblong shields drawn up in a 'phalanx'-type formation with downward thrusting spears. The only difficulty with this supposition is that, unlike the heavy infantry of the *kisir sharruti* who were professional troops and thus received extensive training, these were 'seasonal troops' who perhaps lacked the time prior to the start of a campaign for the drill required for this tactic. However, this may also support the argument that regular infantry served for multiple campaigns. It could be presumed that the Assyrians knew all too well that they could not afford to lose the skills acquired in one campaign by starting all over again the following year with new recruits.

It is noticeable that some of the regular infantry serving in Ashurbanipal's army wear stockings and 'Assyrian boots', previously worn only by the infantry bodyguards attached to the king and the magnates. This may signify that by the time of this king, the lengthy process of equipping all of the soldiery with boots had reached down to the regular infantry and these just happen to be the few who have been so equipped. By the time of the collapse of the empire this was probably still a work in progress.

Heavy Infantry

The infantrymen of the *kisir sharruti* were the professional foot soldiers of the Assyrian Army. Indeed, they were its elite troops and were marked out by virtue of being much better equipped than those of the regular infantry. In the main they were ethnic Assyrians. From the reign of Tiglath-pileser III through to that of Ashurbanipal they wore body armour on their torso and upper arms and shoulders. This comprised bronze or iron scales, many examples of which have been recovered from archaeological excavations at Khorsabad, Nimrud and at Tushan. They served as spearmen, archers and slingers. All wore the Assyrian conical helmet, most likely made of iron by the mid-8th century BC.

Although their external appearance does not change too much over the period, allowing for the many variations in the designs of the kilts that they wear, there is significant development in the number of types and sizes of shields employed by the spearmen. These range in shape from circular – and they get larger – and similar to the hoplon used later by Greek heavy infantry, to those shaped in a manner similar to the oblong Roman scutum of the early empire period but with an arched top. Heavy infantry armed and equipped as those in the *kisir sharruti* also became the norm in the wider army following the extensive military reforms undertaken by Esarhaddon. This would have provided far more well-equipped infantry and substantially increased the combat effectiveness of the Assyrian Army. They can, for example, be seen in quite large numbers in the Til-Tuba wall reliefs from the reign of Ashurbanipal in the British Museum.

It has been inferred that on the battlefield the Assyrian heavy infantry operated in a close order formation – in essence formed up in the equivalent of a phalanx. Shields were carried on the left and the spears – depicted on the reliefs as downward thrusting – carried in the right hand. It seems a reasonable assumption to suggest that Assyrian heavy infantry were the progenitors of the later Greek heavy infantry and indeed, it is only recently

OPPOSITE

This heavy infantryman is based upon a figure seen on the wall reliefs detailing the event of the battle of Til-Tuba. He represents what is likely to have been the final appearance of a heavy infantryman from the reign of Ashurbanipal through to the demise of the empire. All such now wore Assyrian laced-up boots. Their most distinctive feature was the *pavois* shield, which offered a large degree of protection. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)

that archaeological evidence attesting to the service of Greeks – known to the Assyrians as the Yamnaya – in the Assyrian Army has come to light. A Phoenician silver bowl dating to about 700 BC from Amathus on Cyprus has incised upon it the depiction of four Greek mercenary soldiers drawn up in a phalanx on one side of a city with Assyrian soldiers seen on the other. This is the very earliest depiction of a Greek phalanx, and it is not an unreasonable supposition that in the course of operating with the Assyrian Army, Greek mercenaries adopted some of the fighting techniques of their employers, which may have included a proto-phalanx formation.

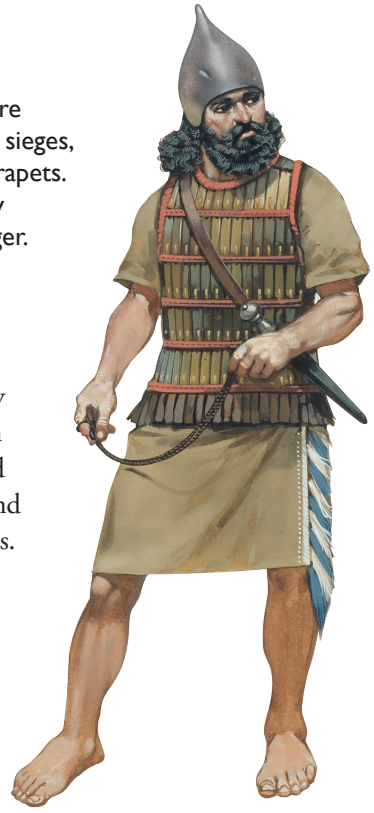
The essence of the way the heavy spearmen operated was that they were a well-disciplined, drilled and trained body of troops. It was this preparation prior to battle that permitted them to become such effective and battle-winning troops in combat. Whereas auxiliary and perhaps even lighter regular infantry operated in a more open order, the heavy spearmen did so in close order. It is unlikely that their enemies faced them in battle with their own equivalent and herein lay the superiority of the Assyrian Army. Although we do not have cuneiform accounts of how they were trained, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the mindset governing this was not dissimilar to that of the later Roman legions with their emphasis on discipline, weapons training, manoeuvre and the constant repetition of the same on the training grounds to hone their expertise, so that when engaged on the battlefield they operated as a coherent body. They could be best described as shock troops and it is unlikely that there were many enemy troops that they came across that could withstand the crash of the Assyrian heavy spearmen on their own drawn-up formations. Whether or not they were silent or noisy when advancing on the enemy, the psychological impact of such a large and disciplined body of men bearing down on one must have been profoundly unnerving – something that the Assyrians, who were acutely aware of the psychological dimension of warfare, would have been very mindful of.

Two other types of heavy infantry are seen on the wall reliefs, albeit in fewer numbers – archers and slingers. In terms of body armour and other clothing, they appear identical to the spearmen, their only distinguishing feature being the

ABOVE

This is the section of the Til-Tuba relief in the British Museum used by the artist to create the figure on p. 206. It shows two surrounded Elamite soldiers about to be dispatched by Assyrian infantry. Of note is the close range at which the bow is being used and also the employment of small battle axes by a number of the Assyrian infantry. (Photo by Fine Art Images/Heritage Images/Getty Images)

armament they operate with. Both of these types of infantry normally appear in the depiction of sieges, especially the siege of Lachish in 701 BC in Judah. The archer is normally seen operating in concert with a shield bearer whose task is clearly to protect the archer, though armoured archers at the siege of Lachish are shown drawn up in ranks without attendant shield bearers. This can be explained by the need for a large volume of arrow fire to suppress the defenders on the wall of the fortress. The arrows are shown carried in quivers across the back, and given the volume of arrow fire needed to suppress the defending enemy on the battlements of the city against which the ramp is being built, the resupply of arrow stocks must have been prodigious. A number of the armoured archers are also eunuchs – they are those depicted without beards. It is also thought that some of the archers depicted in the Lachish reliefs may well have been cavalry archers, who in the absence of an enemy to fight on horseback may have been seconded to operate in a ground role.



RIGHT

Although depictions of slingers are rare, they were nonetheless employed in this period, especially during sieges, when they would have been employed to clear the parapets. This soldier is a native Assyrian and wears an early armoured corselet and is equipped with a short dagger. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)

Armoured slingers are shown operating normally behind the archers, as on the Lachish reliefs. The Assyrian Army did not employ slingers in open field battles as did the Greeks and Romans. Their depiction as serving behind the archers is indicative of the greater range of sling shots. Certainly, the shot recovered from the archaeological excavations at Lachish are not small and carry a weight as can be seen in the images. For defenders on the wall, being assailed by sling shot would have been a very dangerous experience. Given the height of the defending walls and the step behind on which the defenders stood to shoot their own arrows, only the top of their bodies could be seen from below, making the head the most prominent target for the slingers. A hit from a shot would either grievously injure the victim or kill him outright – in most cases the latter. An experienced slinger could aim his shot exceedingly accurately. However, unlike Roman slingers, Assyrian slingers did not employ purposely cast lead shot. They used stone shot that they had shaped before using.

The relative infrequency of the appearance of the slingers has led to the speculation that they were not a specific type of soldier but perhaps spearmen who were slotted into this role as and when the situation demanded. As it is likely that many of the infantry troops serving in the heavy infantry of the *kisir sharruti* came from an agricultural background, and the sling was perhaps the most basic weapon used when working in the fields to ward off wild animals, then just like David in the Old Testament they would have been extremely proficient in the use of this weapon. A poor man's weapon, to be precise, but in the hands of an expert fatally proficient.

By the reign of Ashurbanipal armoured archers and slingers are depicted as no longer wearing the conical Assyrian iron helmet but just a band of material worn as a 'sweat band'. In other respects, they are equipped in the same fashion as those in the reign of Sennacherib.

Organization of the Infantry

It is unfortunate that we do not have any document that sets out the organization of the infantry, something that also applies for the cavalry. That attempted here draws on the work of several professional Assyriologists and has been compiled after many trawls through cuneiform documentation where references to such are made in passing and not directly. For those seeking to find more information on this subject the best books (according to this author) are listed in the bibliography.

The smallest unit of the Assyrian infantry is thought to have been 'the group of ten', with the proviso being that this is at best an inference drawn from the civilian employment of workers into similar groupings. There is no direct attestation in cuneiform sources of this being the smallest unit of infantry. However, it is a reasonable assumption. The title of the commander of such a unit was *rab esherti.*.

The title of *rab hanshe* is known to be the commander of 50 infantry or chariotry. Fifty men constituted the equivalent of an infantry platoon, with the earliest use of the title of the commander of 50 dating to 791 BC.

The basic structure of the Assyrian Army was grounded on the body of troops known as the 'cohort' of uncertain size – it is possible it is a generic term for a large body of soldiers. The term is also used by the Assyrians to describe the units of enemy troops. Documentation illustrates that the cohort was also the basis of the organization of certain types of workers in the civilian sector, such as blacksmiths, scribes, etc. Thus far, the names of 217 cohort commanders have been identified, with the earliest dating back to the reign of Tiglath-pileser I. The title of the cohort commander was *rab kisir* and in the military chain of command he fell midway between the *rab hanshe* and the prefect. Captured foreign troops were impressed into cohorts to serve in the Assyrian Army, as in the case of the Philistine cohort established by Sargon II.

The prefect, or *shaknu*, was the highest-ranking officer active on the field of battle. He was superior to the commanders of cohorts and had charge of one or more of them on the battlefield. Evidence from cuneiform documents shows the prefects were of great importance and status within the Assyrian government.

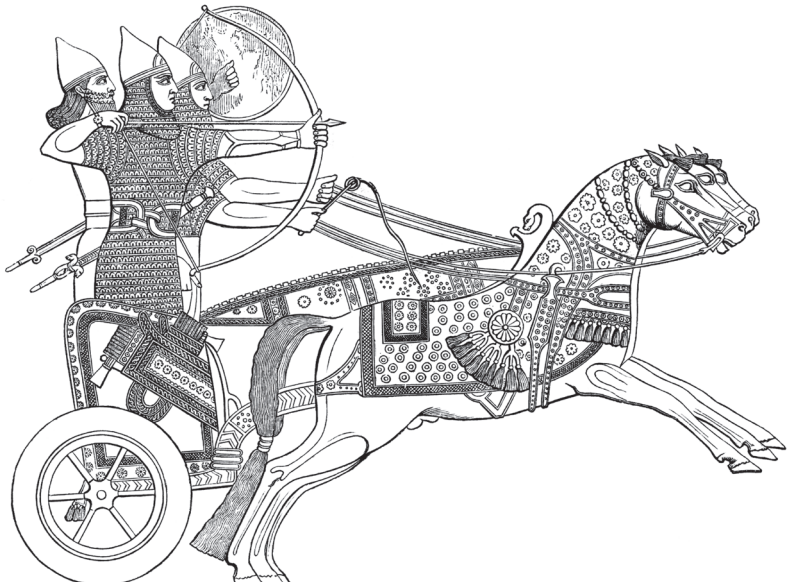
THE CHARIOTRY

For the greater part of the second millennium BC and through the first three centuries of the first millennium, the most prized weapon in any army in the Ancient Near East was the war chariot. Its operation was regarded in the main as the preserve of the elite of whichever city-state was operating them,

with the status of the archers/spearmen using them being primarily of noble rank. This was certainly so in the Assyria of the Middle Empire and in the early period of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, when the main strength of the army in this period lay in its chariot force. This changed over the centuries, as the rise in the effectiveness of the cavalry arm and the much more varied, and in many cases harsher, terrain over which the army now fought reduced the role of the chariotry. It is perhaps going too far to argue that chariots were no longer important in the later empire period, as the apogee of chariot design in Assyria, and indeed anywhere, is to be seen in the very large, four-man-crewed, four-horse machine depicted on reliefs dating from the reign of Ashurbanipal.

Chariots were still being built for the Assyrian Army as late as 612 BC – the very date associated with the final demise of the empire. It follows that they were still seen, at least in some quarters, as a viable weapon. The evidence for this comes from the archaeological excavations conducted on the Tell at Ziyaret Tepe – ancient Tushan – near Diyarbakir in modern south-eastern Turkey, in what was the ancient Assyrian province also called Tushan. The archaeological team excavating the site uncovered a small tablet covered by cuneiform script dating to *c.*612 BC (see p. 14). When translated it was found to be a message from one Manu-ki-libbali to Tushan's treasurer stating that the instruction he had been given to raise a unit of chariotry was impossible to carry out as the infrastructure existing within the city to do so was no longer in place. None of those artisans whose expertise would normally have been employed to build them was any longer present in the city. Shortly thereafter Tushan was taken by the Babylonian Army.

Although the kings of Assyria from 745 BC through to the end of the empire are depicted on their wall reliefs riding on their campaigns in chariots, the absence of the depiction of war chariots in battle contexts from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III – other than in the reliefs of Sargon II – is taken as further evidence of the decline of the chariot arm and the expansion of the cavalry. However, Sargon speaks of taking 'his cavalry and chariotry' with him on his 710 BC campaign in Babylonia. When Sennacherib's reliefs and cuneiform accounts are examined, the former show only the command chariot of the king and a few supporting chariots as seen on the Lachish. However, in the cuneiform account of the battle of Halule there are more than a few references to chariots, and Sennacherib speaks of sending his own and accompanying cavalry to chase after the retreating kings of Babylon and Elam. Furthermore, when Austen Layard uncovered the Lachish reliefs in his excavation of the south-western palace in the 1840s, he stated that he did not retrieve all of them for transportation to the British Museum in London. Reliefs from the wall on the left-hand side of Room XXXVI in which all of the reliefs had



ABOVE

An image of a 9th-century chariot. Of note is that both the archer and the driver are equipped with the full-length armour that is literally head to toe. At this time, most archers were of the social elite, the chariotry still being seen as the preserve of the nobility. The cab is quite low, offering little protection to the crew. This would change over time. Even at this early period, the cab is richly decorated, as is the horse furniture. (Bettmann/Getty Images)

originally been displayed were not taken. These would have depicted the arrival of the Assyrian Army before Lachish and they illustrated cavalry and *charioteers*. In 701 BC at least, chariots still figured as part of the makeup of the Assyrian Army.

There is no evidence to suggest that chariots of this weight or size were built for combat by any other power.

The very first illustration of an Assyrian war chariot dates from the 12th century BC and is found on a seal impression recovered from the city of Ashur. Compared to what came later, it can rightly be described as a light chariot. The chariot body itself is open to the sides. Protection is negligible for the crew of two, one being the driver and the other the archer. The next visual evidence showing the appearance of Assyrian chariots dates from the reign of Ashurnasirpal II and is found on the wall reliefs from his palace at Nimrud. The images on the Balawat Gates, which primarily date from the reign of his successor, Shalmaneser III, show many chariots along with cavalry – but the latter are not yet as important as the chariotry. Indeed, Shalmaneser at one point claimed that he possessed horses to equip 2,002 chariots. Assuming three per chariot – that is

BELOW

A chariot of the period of Ashurnasirpal or Shalmaneser III is seen being escorted by a warrior. It is difficult to gauge the accuracy of the size of the individuals on this relief as the soldier behind the chariot and horse team is higher than both. It does suggest that the horses at this time were quite small – about 13 hands high – and the chariot cab itself only just reaches slightly above the knees of the driver. (Kamira/Shutterstock)

two runners and one spare – that would total approximately 6,000 horses for the chariots alone, with another 5,542 horses to equip the cavalry. Most of these horses would have been secured through booty from campaigning and tribute. The Balawat Gate illustrations show chariots operating in several contexts: being used by the king when hunting, crossing a river, and in scenes of battle itself. In the latter the chariot(s) are seen chasing retreating enemy foot soldiers in what is probably the archetypal role of the chariotry at this time.

These chariots are illustrated with three horses, although it is thought that only two were drawing the chariot, whilst the third was a spare (but this is still a matter for debate). The main argument against the idea of there being three-horse chariots is that it would make control of the chariot difficult because the team would be unbalanced. Additionally, given how horses were targeted by enemy archers, it would be virtually impossible for a chariot team to replace a

wounded horse with the spare one in the midst of battle. It has also been argued that the 'third horse' was added for 'artistic balance', which offers a credible explanation.

The chariots of Ashurnasirpal II are shown with a semi-rounded cab, which is panelled, with the height of the cab extending to just below the waist height of the three-man crew. There has also been an evolution in the design of the chariot over and above that of the cab. The historian Duncan Noble describes the following:

> A feature that probably started with the connecting pole from the top of the chariot body to the yoke in earlier vehicles had now been developed into a kind of springy shock absorber. The upper pole from the top of the chariot body to the yoke had given way to a lentoid construction with upper and lower curved edges. It is now generally interpreted that these are two thin springy members held in position and restrained by bindings that are covered in decorated fabric. As the chariot bounces up and down the springs flex and absorb the shock that might otherwise shear the joint of the supporting pole with the main draught pole that takes the pull from the yoke to the body.

The wheels have six spokes and are not large, with the top of the wheel reaching as high as the lower level of the crew cab, which is enclosed on three sides. Sometimes a chariot can be seen with a spiked shield across the back of the cab, offering protection to the rear of the vehicle and possibly helping to retain the crew in the cab and not being thrown out backwards. Arrows are carried in two quivers attached diagonally across the right-hand side of the cab, with easy access for the archer. These quivers also carried small axes which were most likely throwing weapons. In a few of the reliefs, the cab is shown mounting the round standard of one of the gods.

A characteristic feature of both the drivers and chariot archers dating from the period from the 9th through to the mid-8th century, and which disappears thereafter, is that they wore the heavy, bronze scaled body armour extending from the head to the ankle. This is clearly seen in the colour illustration of one such warrior used on p. 199 and was the same as that worn by the heavy infantry. The 'third man' in the chariot was not armoured; his task was to use his shield to offer protection from arrows and thrown weapons for the other two members of the crew. On the reliefs, those horses drawing the chariots used by the armoured archers are shown with highly ornamented neck and body cloths made of linen or more likely wool. This may well have provided a modicum of protection from enemy arrows.

How chariots were employed in battle has commanded much discussion over the years. The assumption of many that they were used to charge directly at an enemy drawn up for battle is doubtful. Ann Hyland, an equine specialist, writing of the horse in the ancient world, has observed that once battle began it was very likely that:

> individual and/or small numbers of chariots did enter into the thick of fighting, either from battle ardour, horses bolting or being uncontrolled, or even human stupidity, in a rout of an enemy when a field could have been covered with fleeing chariots and pursuing victors in a very loose or no formation as horses ran at their individual best speeds. If ever launched, en masse chariots would have rapidly dispersed and have become individual fighting platforms, again the factor being the individual horse team's speed. It is strongly doubted that the head-on charge was the normal method of warfare. The horse was far too valuable to be risked in great numbers. Added to that, there would always have been some less aggressive horses that veered away from the intimidation of opposing horses, and in doing so they would have created chaos. Horses do not willingly crash into each other, and if a horse had gone repeatedly into charge it would have lost its initial assurance.

There are some very important correctives offered here which place the use of chariots in a more realistic light. Given how important an investment the chariot arm was to any city-state employing them, not just the Assyrians, their use would be governed by the need to spare as many of them from unnecessary harm or loss as possible. This also goes some way to explaining perhaps the quite large numbers of enemy chariots that Assyrian kings claim to have captured in battle and thereafter incorporated into their own chariot ranks. Hyland's observations are applicable to the use of the chariot by the Assyrians – and indeed to all powers operating them over the three centuries of their employment in the Neo-Assyrian period. The nature of open field battles wherein chariots were employed did not change very much in that period. In terms of visual evidence, we have no images on wall reliefs showing Assyrian chariots for the 79-year period between the end of the reign of Shalmaneser III and the accession of Tiglath-pileser III in 745 BC.

Chariots After 745 BC

Apart from his command chariot and a few supporting examples, the wall reliefs that we have illustrating the numerous campaigns of Tiglath-pileser III show no chariots being employed in battle. This has been taken by some to indicate that the chariot arm was no longer viewed as the elite arm of the army

OPPOSITE

When 'large horses' from Nubia were first gifted to Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II, they made a great impression. The latter monarch said that there was nothing like them in Assyria. The procuring of such horses thereafter became a priority for the Assyrian Army. (Photo by Werner Forman/Universal Images Group/Getty Images)

– its place being taken by the expanding cavalry arm. This is also implied by the number of occasions that raids are launched, particularly in the Zagros, to acquire large numbers of horses. Of those that were acquired in this reign and later, those described as 'being broken to the yoke' are those that would have been employed for use on chariots, so they were clearly still being employed.

One possible explanation to account for the lack of chariots in the reliefs of this king are that it reflects the very wide-ranging campaigning he undertook, some of which involved operating over problematic terrain for chariots. Operations in the Zagros and in Urartu would have been difficult for chariots by virtue of the nature of the country in which they had to operate. Operations in the latter kingdom would have brought the Assyrian Army in contact with the numerous cavalry employed by the Urartian Army. Whilst they did use chariots, as can be seen by the three-man chariot in the Van Museum in Armenia, they were few relative to the much larger cavalry arm they deployed.

Being a man of pragmatic bent, it would seem reasonable to infer that Tiglath-pileser recognized the much greater utility of cavalry in terms of their ability to operate in all terrains in a way that chariots could not. They were also more economical. A chariot represented a much greater economic investment than a cavalry trooper, and if the cavalry were also archers it took only one horse to carry the same armament as a whole chariot.

Tiglath-pileser died in 727 BC and Sargon II ascended the throne in 721 BC after the short five-year reign of Shalmaneser IV. Chariots then make their reappearance on his reliefs. On his Nimrud Prism, Sargon tells us that following the fall of Samaria in 720 BC he incorporated 200 chariots into his 'Royal Army'. Chariotry from this source was held in high regard by the Assyrians not least because it used 'great horses' – that is horses from Nubia. It is a further measure of the esteem in which they were held that this cohort of chariotry was the only one for which evidence is available that it was given a title named after its geographical origin. Nonetheless, when next mentioned, some ten years later, its composition had changed in having a distinctly international character. This has prompted some scholars to think that this constitutes evidence that these non-Assyrian military formations were deliberately mixed to prevent any attempt at rebellion.

The most noticeable difference between earlier chariots and those of Tiglath-pileser and his successors lies in the design of the wheel. Whereas those employed on the chariots of Ashurnasirpal had six spokes that were slotted into a thin inner rim and a thick outer rim, later chariots had eight spokes to strengthen the wheel. This was further reinforced by the addition of two opposed pairs of metal, wedge-shaped brackets that joined the two rims of the wheel and overlapped them. The shape of the cab also changed, with the emergence of one constructed of three upright sections allowing the mounting of the quivers upright on the front corners of the cab. Thus the archer could merely lean forward to retrieve an arrow. Close order weapons remained the same. The presumption is that the introduction of these 'new' features collectively yielded up a stronger and more robust chariot design.

It is with the reign of Sennacherib that we see the appearance of larger chariots, and this may well be the consequence of the introduction of larger horse types. Although still pulled by two horses, it is the wheels that have yet again seen change. Although they have eight spokes, the wheels are larger than those used during the reign of the two preceding monarchs. Indeed, their height seems to exceed that of a man and serves to raise the cab higher from the ground. The addition of metal studs to the wheels suggests yet a further attempt to increase the chariot's ability to cope with more uneven terrain. In the face of the growth of the size and weight of the chariot, we see the the shift to them being pulled by four-horse teams.

This type of very large chariot is clearly illustrated in the reliefs of Ashurbanipal and represents not only the high point of the chariot in Assyrian service but also of chariot design in toto. However, there is much speculation about why such a design was necessary, given how chariotry in the Assyrian Army seemed to be losing out to the expansion of the cavalry arm. These very large chariots must have represented a significant investment of resources, drawn as they were by four horses, taking longer to build and utilizing more materials to construct, and carrying four men of which just one was an archer.

Why bother building them at all? It would have been a very expensive way of providing a good platform for an archer. The four horses alone could have carried four horse archers, and this would have been a far more economical way of delivering missile fire. There can be no doubt that having a number of these 'tank-like' chariots charging at an enemy line would have generated a profound sense of fear greater than that of earlier chariots. The weight alone of the fully loaded chariot must have turned it into a formidable assault weapon on the battlefield, albeit one useful only on level terrain as the issues involved in deploying it in hilly country were probably insurmountable.

It is likely therefore that chariots still formed part of the inventory of the Assyrian Army down to the demise of the empire, even if it was the case that the size of the chariot arm had retreated in the face of the rise of the cavalry arm since the 9th century BC. That chariots were still regarded as prestigious was also a perception that survived through to the end of the empire as carriages for the Assyrian elite. The reason for the survival of a chariot arm may

OPPOSITE

This colour image clearly illustrates what is likely to have been the rationale for the introduction of a large chariot. It cannot have been its role as carrying an archer. The chariot and its horses represent a massive investment of resources for it to just carry the same number of archers as smaller chariots. The primary reasons were those of prestige and the psychological impact of this 'tank' of a chariot bearing down upon the enemy. Although they are depicted on the wall reliefs of Ashurbanipal, the image on p. 141 is the only one that illustrates such a chariot at speed; all the others show them at rest.
(Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)

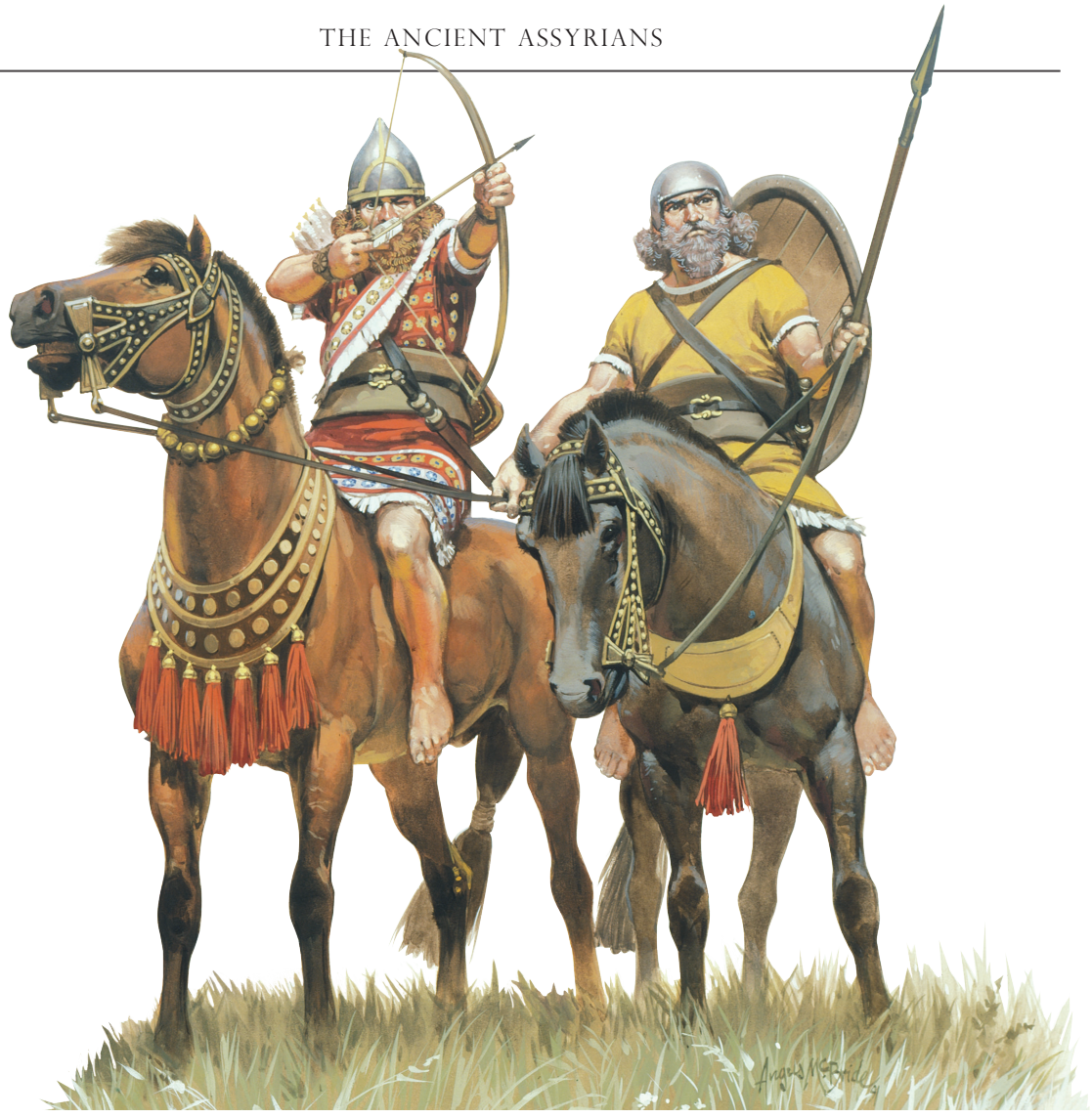
simply have been the consequence of the inability of a conservative military institution to forgo a weapon that had carried such prestige over so many centuries. But there is no question that it was in Assyria that the chariot reached its developmental apogee.

THE CAVALRY

Although the Assyrians are credited with introducing the world's first fully fledged independent cavalry arm and were thereby the progenitors of all those that came along after, they were not the first to employ mounted troops. The horse arrived in the Near East a few millennia before the first cavalry were ever employed and was used for pulling chariots. The chariot was the chosen weapon of the elites of all city-states in the Near East until at least the 8th century BC when the first organized cavalry arm under the Assyrians made its appearance. That cavalry had not done so in large numbers prior to that date has much to do with the size of horses and their physical capacity to carry riders.

The first mounted warriors that the Assyrians encountered were in those lands to the south of what later came to be called Urartu. The extremely mountainous terrain of that region lent itself more to the riding of horses than using them to pull chariots, though it is known that the peoples of that region, and also Urartu, continued to use chariots. Even in their military culture the chariot retained its prestige despite the fact that cavalry was more useful.

Although earlier Assyrian kings mention capturing horses as booty from the regions of Nairi and Gilzanu, it is only with the Annals of Tukulti-ninurta II that we get a suggestion that he was already employing cavalry for his personal 'escort'. While on the throne for only six years, he nonetheless led several major military campaigns. Sometime during his first five campaigns his forces engaged in the Nairi lands and he stated that, having destroyed two



cities of Ammi-bali, son of Zanmani, the latter: 'to save his life, seized my feet, and I pardoned him'.

However, this was conditional on the supply of specific tribute: 'I made him swear: 'You will furnish horses to my bodyguards'.

Assyrian Cavalry 883–745 BC

Tukulti-ninurta II died in 884 BC and his son Ashurnasirpal came to the throne. Assyrian cavalry can be seen in action alongside the army's chariots on the well-preserved wall reliefs from his later capital at Nimrud. The assumption must be that cavalry were already part of the Assyrian Army even before Ashurnasirpal's ascension to the throne, by virtue of the simple

OPPOSITE

When cavalry first made their appearance in the 9th century BC they did so as a team, this being indicative of the low level of horsemanship in this new arm of the Assyrian Army. At this time the archer could not both shoot his arrows and control his horse. He had an assistant to control his reins while he did so. This mimics the way a chariot team operated. Neither of the riders wears armour, and while the archer wears the pointed Assyrian helmet, his assistant wears a metal cap called a *gulgullatu*. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)

BELOW

A further example of the poor horsemanship of the period is reflected in the seat of the rider observed in this section from the Balawat Gates dating from the reign of Shalmaneser III. His legs and thighs are drawn up to grip the barrel of the horse. It was not until the 8th century BC that we see Assyrian cavalry troopers sitting on the back of the horse with their legs hanging down on the sides of the horse, using their knees to grip. (Photo by CM Dixon/Heritage Images/Getty Images)

observation that the provision of even a limited infrastructure within Assyria for catering for a large number of cavalry horses, and the associated facilities for working up the training of the horses and the troopers to ride them, could not have been realized overnight. Ashurnasirpal also stated in his Annals that in his third campaign against Zamua: 'The chariots and picked cavalrymen I took with me'. Elsewhere we have him state: 'The chariots, the cavalrymen, the foot soldiers I took with me'. Nor was it just Assyria that had a cavalry force. The king also speaks of his taking with him 'the chariots, the horsemen and the foot soldiers of Hattina', one of his vassal kingdoms.

That the Assyrians were still low on the learning curve in the use of cavalry can be inferred by the way cavalry can be seen operating on the wall reliefs at this time. Indeed, the inference to be drawn is that the standard of riding was not high. They do not operate alone, but in pairs, with one of the horsemen holding the reins of the other as he shoots his arrows. It has been observed that this is a procedure that mimics the relationship of a chariot driver and his onboard archer. This, however, should not be surprising as they would have drawn on whatever equine experience they possessed to help address this new role of riding rather than driving a horse. It is also very likely that the first Assyrian cavalrymen came from those who had experience of driving and fighting in chariots. However, this manner of operating is also indicative of the limited experience that Assyrian cavalrymen had in using their charges, as is shown by the archer on the reliefs: 'being very insecurely perched on the horse's back, his thighs almost parallel with the horse's topline, his lower legs drawn up, gripping the horse's barrel' (A. Hyland).

This modus operandi operates through to the reign of Shalmaneser III and can be also seen on the Balawat Gates, a reconstruction of which can be seen in the British Museum. The archer wears the conical helmet, whereas his escort is seen to employ a rounded metal cap called a *gulgullatu* and carries a shield and a spear. However, in Shalmaneser III's reign both members of the team wear the conical helmet. In battle, when the archer readied himself to shoot, the escort went alongside the archer and held his reins as he did so, with the horses themselves being halted to enable the archer to loose. This can be seen illustrated in the colour image on p. 220. It is in this configuration that Assyrian cavalry would have fought in the large battle at Qarqar in 853 BC against an enemy comprising 1,200 cavalry from Damascus and 700 from Hamath.

In one of his inscriptions Shalmaneser gives us an insight into the number of horses he was able to deploy later in his reign when he tells us that he had horses for 2,002 chariots and that he had equipped 5,542 horsemen for the service of Assyria. There is some indication that horse armour was employed during Shalmaneser's reign, as is indicated by a short reference on a cuneiform tablet which states 'coats of iron mail for horses'. This would have required some form

of underlay possibly made of felt or cloth to prevent the horse from experiencing chafing from the mail. Later Assyrian horse armour was made of leather.

There is no visual evidence that Assyrian cavalry made the move to embrace the more normal operation of one warrior per horse until the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, though it is probable – even in the absence of evidence – that this change had occurred within the Assyrian Army before he came to the throne in 745 BC. Although there is much damage to the cuneiform texts that cover the campaigns of Tiglath-pileser III, the wall reliefs are in a good enough condition to enable us to see the manner in which Assyrian cavalry had evolved in the years since the death of Shalmaneser III. One of the key developments shown which enabled horse archers to operate singly in the 8th century BC was the introduction of a device called 'the nightingale', a reins-holder that permitted the horse archer to shoot his arrows while keeping his mount on track whilst moving forward.

The Cavalry of the Imperial Period

The cavalry of the army of Tiglath-pileser III are of two types: unarmoured and armoured troopers. In all cases, both types are depicted on the wall reliefs riding in pairs. This does not mean they operated as in the reigns of the earlier kings, but rather it is an artistic convention to suggest the cavalry operating in mass. Both types wear the distinctive Assyrian pointed helmets and the primary weapon they employed was the lance, using an overarm, downward thrusting motion whilst riding down their enemy. Interestingly, most are shown without any other weapon, although in one image a trooper wears a short sword. It would seem likely that many more would have carried a short sword even if the artists chose not to illustrate them doing so.

The unarmoured lancers wear a cloth tunic – possibly one piece – which extends to the knee with a wide belt worn across the midriff, which would provide support and protect the lower spine from stress and damage during the sometimes rough riding they undertook. The troopers wore no shoes and are seen sitting on a saddle cloth made from an animal skin (the Assyrian Army never employed saddles, as they were yet to be invented), although there are other images where the rider employs one made of cloth with what are clearly colourful designs. The horse furniture is decorated and the horses wear layered pompoms on the head and under their necks, as do those of the armoured lancers. The armoured cavalry are serving in the *kisir sharruti* and wear a tunic, on top of which is worn a scale armour shirt. The armour was made either of bronze or iron, with each of the respective scales sown on to a backing of a leather jerkin. Archaeologists have recovered many of these metal scales in the *ekal marsharti* – the military arsenal – at Nimrud and Khorsabad.

OPPOSITE

Late Assyrian cavalry from the reign of Ashurbanipal, well equipped with composite bow and arrows, sword and lance. The torso is protected by a lamellar armour shirt. The horses' bodies are covered with leather 'armour' protection.
(Photo By DEA / G. DAGLI ORTI/De Agostini via Getty Images)

Scale armour was also uncovered at the excavations at Ziyaret Tepe, the former Assyrian fortified city of Tushan. From the waist down the troopers wear a kilt that extended to the knees. It was common to see a 'pendant fringe' hanging down, albeit tucked in behind the mid-waist belt. In common with the unarmoured lancers, they wear no shoes.

In the few short years between the end of the reign of Tiglath-pileser in 727 BC and that of Sargon II (721–705 BC), the armoured cavalry became more heavily armed. What would continue into the reign of Sargon would be the trend that has been noted by a few commentators of a decline in the importance of the chariot arm, assuming of course that the numbers of troop types on the wall reliefs properly reflect their actual distribution in the army. Indeed, in the reliefs of Tiglath-pileser the only chariots to be seen are those used by the king and a few empty examples. That being said, they reappear on the reliefs of Sargon II, albeit in fewer numbers. There is no question that the number of cavalry formations in the Assyrian Army saw a major enlargement under Sargon II. This is certainly implied by the number of horses secured during Sargon's reign which points to a huge growth in the size of the cavalry arm, and of the number of horses to service the continuing use of chariots. However, unlike those of the preceding king, we cannot simply call them lancers as there has been an increase in the number of weapons carried by the cavalry.

Throughout the course of his reign, whenever he was on campaign, the king was always attended by his cavalry escort of 1,000 men under the command of his 'favourite' brother and chief vizier, Sin-ahu-usur. Whereas other kings were perhaps reluctant to entrust male siblings with such a distinguished role because of any ambitions they may have themselves harboured concerning the throne, in this case Sargon positively demonstrated his trust in his brother and his capacities. Sargon himself says in his Annals: 'With my single chariot and my cavalry, which never left my side, either in enemy or in friendly country, the regiment of Sin-ahu-usur'.

These were of course drawn from the *kisir sharruti* and attended the king wherever he went. It was this unit that Sargon employed when he diverted an element of his army to sack the city of Musasir on the Assyrian Army's return from Urartu in 714 BC.

All Sargonid cavalry are shown sitting farther forward on the charges in a deeper firmer seat when compared to the cavalry of Shalmaneser III. This is a significant advance as the much firmer grip permitted the lancers to wield their weapons with much greater effectiveness. Their ability to do this would have been aided by a device called the *pompon* whose purpose was to assist the rider in maintaining tension on the reins and thereby to keep the horse's head level, a necessity to allow the horse archer to use both hands to shoot his arrows. Given how significant the horse archers were in battle for the Assyrians,

the ability of a multitude of them to repeatedly let loose barrages of arrows would have turned on their ability to maintain control of their charges.

Indeed, the cavalry of Sargon's time carry lances as well as composite bows and quiver. The bow is carried on the shoulder of the opposite arm to that which the trooper employs to carry his lance, with the quiver slung across his back. Almost all the cavalry troopers are shown carrying a short sword/dagger on the opposite side of the body to the arm employed for carrying the lance. On none of the Sargonid reliefs is any of the cavalry shown wearing armoured tunics, just cloth garments that cover the torso and reach down to the knees. One of the notable changes is that in most cases cavalry are now shown wearing leggings that both protect the legs and also keep them warm. The feet are also now protected by the wearing of the first examples seen in the reliefs of the military boot that becomes more commonplace in later reigns. Another change seems to be that lances are used now both overarm and underarm. This would have been much more effective in close order combat.

The cavalry of Sennacherib shown on the reliefs from his palace illustrate a further evolution from his father's army. Their appearance, as with that of the infantry, shows that they have all become armoured, suggesting the possibility that this had now become 'uniform' throughout the mounted arm. Indeed, this is also a feature of all the cavalry seen on the reliefs of his grandson, Ashurbanipal. In both reigns, the armoured cavalry are of two types – archers and lancers – suggesting that the cavalry were organized into units of either one or the other. The only exception in either case was with the cavalry of the king's bodyguard, which are equipped with both bows and lances. The bodyguard troopers are equipped with arrow quivers that also house their composite bows when not in use, and their dress and that of their horses is more ornate than that of the regular cavalry.

It is unfortunate for our understanding of the armour and weaponry utilized by an Assyrian cavalryman at this time that we have no written details. However, we can draw on the evidence provided by another source, albeit later and from a non-Assyrian source. This derives from a Neo-Babylonian cuneiform document that discusses the equipment purchased for an armoured cavalryman serving in the Persian Army of Darius I in 520 BC. It states that what was purchased with the loan was as follows:

- 1 horse with its harness and 'saddles' (that is, what passed for such at this time).
- 1 *suhattu* cloth garment.
- 1 suit of iron scale armour and a *karbatallu* cap which belongs with the armour.

- 1 neck protector which belongs to the *suhattu* cloth.
- 1 *suhattu* cloth.
- 1 *suhattu* cap.
- 1 bow and arrow case made of bronze.

Although there is some debate about the exact meaning of some of the cuneiform terms, they seem to suggest the following:

- 1 one bow-and-arrow case with 120 mounted arrows, ten unmounted arrows (?).
- 1 *tepu* weapon of iron with case.
- 2 lances [iron].

As the Babylonian Army, and even the Persian Army of the Achaemenids, looked back to the Assyrian Army and drew a degree of inspiration from it, it seems likely that this cavalry trooper when bedecked with all his equipment and sitting on his horse would not have looked too different from a cavalryman dating to the time of Ashurbanipal.

We have no visual evidence in the form of reliefs that allows us to view the army of Esarhaddon, but it is unlikely it differed much if at all from that of Sennacherib. Indeed, this is also true of the cavalry of Ashurbanipal, which is at the apogee in terms of the evolution of the Assyrian cavalry arm. All cavalry troopers, be they of the regular army or the king's bodyguard, wear the armoured tunic, with the scales being likely made of iron rather than bronze given the prevalence of iron usage within the army by this date (although bronze armour was probably still being used). By this date the empire was able to manufacture masses of iron weaponry, helmets and body armour. This was not produced just in Assyria, and would have been levied as part of the annual taxation from the provinces of the 7th-century empire. Centres such as Damascus had a reputation for fine-grade iron weaponry and armour, and would have figured in a significant fashion in the provision of both on an ongoing basis. Supplies of iron were plentiful and the numbers of iron workers employed throughout the empire were more than able to produce the quantities required.

For the first time in the history of the Assyrian Army, the horses as well as their riders are seen with tailored sheets of leather armour covering much of the horses' bodies. The armour was made of large leather panels held together by toggles, examples of which have been uncovered in excavations. This points to the cavalry of Ashurbanipal being the heaviest ever fielded by the Assyrian Army during the three centuries of their existence. This horse body armour extended from the withers to past the hip, with the depth of the armour extending downwards to just above the line of the lower belly. It is very likely

that the bulk of the cavalry in the *kisir sharruti* was now being issued with Kusean mounts detailed by the Assyrians as coming 'from Egypt'. These were taller and stronger and thus more able to carry the extra weight. Such would have made the Assyrian cavalry nearly irresistible in the charge.

It is a reasonable supposition that cavalry horses did not wear their armour all the time and on campaign, and that it would have been carried on support wagons. The Assyrian Army was frequently engaged upon wide-ranging campaigns in inimical conditions in very high temperatures and over harsh terrain. They would have been concerned to alleviate the horses as much as possible from the stresses that this would have induced. In this scenario, preparation for battle would have included the horse armour being added at this point.

Many of the reliefs of Ashurbanipal illustrating cavalry also show them wearing a heavy thick poll pad, which protected this part of the horse's head as it was vulnerable to being 'poleaxed' in close combat by enemy infantry. The reliefs of the battle of Til-Tuba in 649 BC show just how intermingled Assyrian cavalry became in battle with hordes of enemy infantry and thus how vulnerable they could be to that type of assault.

The Organization of the Cavalry

Unlike Ancient Greece and Rome, for which we have several literary works that have survived down to the present dealing with many aspects of their armies and the manner in which they fought, in the case of Assyria we have nothing. When it comes to attempting to detail matters to do with the organization of the various arms of service, in most cases we have to draw an inference from what is seen on the wall reliefs, but more importantly from what can be gleaned from the myriad cuneiform documents found on clay tablets. In the case of the cavalry, this is a short section – short because there is not a great deal of information.

One figure does emerge as being a standard for the size of a large cavalry unit, and that is of one thousand horsemen. Although this emerges primarily as being the size of the bodyguard unit that protected Sargon II under the command of his brother Sin-ahu-usur, the mention of this figure in other contexts in cuneiform documents suggests that this was a standard size for the largest body of Assyrian cavalry. That this also became a standard for other post-Assyrian armies is echoed in Persian annals.

BELOW

This is how it is thought a heavy cavalry trooper in the very late empire would have looked. The horse is by this date also armoured, with a large leather covering being worn over its body with the parts of the armour linked together by the use of toggles. Organized into divisions of 1,000 horses, it is understandable how in the Old Testament, Assyrian cavalry are referred to as 'hurricanes on horseback'. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)

CHAPTER TEN

ASPECTS OF THE NEO-ASSYRIAN WAR MACHINE

MANPOWER

In the face of our inability to give an accurate estimate of the size of the Assyrian population between the 9th and 6th centuries BC, it is very difficult to determine the number of men available for service in the army. Nonetheless, the number was sufficiently large to permit the fielding of armies that were operating on virtually an annual basis for some three centuries between 934 and 612 BC. And whilst many of the soldiers that served under Assyrian colours through to 612 BC were not native Assyrian, certainly after 745 BC, it was the case that in the 9th to the mid-7th century they were, and the population was clearly large enough to permit Ashurnasirpal II and his son Shalmaneser III to field large military expeditions with manpower drawn from an essentially native Assyrian

OPPOSITE

Only one iron Assyrian helmet has ever been found and that was by Layard in his excavations at Nineveh. Parts of others have however been located. Many thousands of these were made over the centuries of the empire's existence, so it is surprising that more have not been recovered. However, being made of iron they succumbed to corrosion in the same manner as iron weaponry.
(© The Trustees of the British Museum)

population. Shalmaneser III was able to raise a force at least equal in size to the coalition army that was met in battle at Qarqar in 853 BC. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that the number of conscripts called to the colours on an annual basis by the Assyrian monarch far exceeded by a substantial number the equivalent that could be raised by any one of the numerous smaller, or even the coalitions of, Aramaean city-states that were the principal opposition in this period. Assyrian monarchs were conscious of this, quite often in their annals referring to the 'mighty hosts of Ashur' – an actual empirical description rather than mere propaganda.

Historians have been wary of attempting to put a figure to the population of ancient western Asia, though there have been attempts to do so for the Achaemenid Persian Empire, which may be helpful for providing a basic number to work with. In his article on the Neo-Assyrian Empire in *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires*, Peter R. Bedford employs a survey that assumes a high estimate for the population for the Achaemenid Empire of some 30–35 million people. The satrapy (province) of Mesopotamia, which included both Assyria and Babylonia in Persian times, was estimated to have a population in the region of 5 to 6 million, roughly equal to that of Egypt. However, this number is couched, as are other figures for this empire in the survey, with the rider that these are highly speculative figures, predicated as they are upon questionable and debatable evidence. It therefore seems reasonable to suggest a hypothetical figure for the native population of Assyria between 935 and 612 BC of at least 3 million, and probably more. Although there is archaeological evidence from the later empire of a period of cumulative loss of native Assyrians from the land because of war, and despite the import of deported foreigners to make up for this, there may well have been a significant reduction in the population servicing the agricultural sector and thus of the ethnic Assyrian manpower available for service in the army.

The eminent Assyriologist Mario Liverani, whilst recognizing that 'estimating the size of the Assyrian army is not easy as the existing data points are few and may have been exaggerated', has nonetheless hypothesized the following sizes for Assyrian armies. Between 930 and 850 BC he argues that armies were about 20,000 in number. Thereafter, they get progressively larger, such that in the hundred years between 850 and 750 BC they grow to about 60,000 men. For example, the largest army raised by Ashurnasirpal II according to one of his inscriptions was 50,000 men.

An instance of Liverani's potential exaggeration can be seen in the case of Shalmaneser III, who states in a record from his Annals on a bull-colossus from Nimrud that: 'in the fourteenth year of reign I mustered [the people] of the whole wide land, in countless numbers. With 120,000 of my soldiers I crossed the Euphrates at its flood'.

There was provision in Assyria for an extraordinary *bitqu*, should need demand it, by which far more men would be mobilized than normal, so perhaps this is an example of one such. If 120,000 men were mobilized, it serves to illustrate the manpower reserves available to the Assyrian state at this time. Although there may be sound reasons for suggesting that the number given is far larger than almost any other army found in the Annals – including those that invaded Egypt under Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal in the 7th century BC – to go from 50,000 as the largest army that Ashurnasirpal raised in the previous reign to over double that a few decades later by his son does suggest that this may be a case of hyperbole. Nonetheless, if it is the case that such a huge army was raised and employed, it would be the most graphic example of what the Assyrian kings meant when they spoke of the 'mighty host of Ashur'. However, on this occasion it did not deliver the outcome that Shalmaneser III presumed it would, as victory was denied to the Assyrians in their wider campaign in Syria.

In the imperial period, beginning in 745 BC with the accession of Tiglath-pileser III down through to 630 BC, Liverani suggests that these armies increased to some 100,000 in size. There are grounds, based on the sheer scale of the enterprise, for arguing that the largest and widest-ranging operations carried out by the Assyrian Army – that is the invasions of Egypt under Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal – saw the mobilization of forces larger in size than 100,000 men by virtue of the inclusion of troops from client states to bolster the numbers. These numbers suggest that the account in the Old Testament of the destruction of Sennacherib's army of 183,000 men at the 'hand' of the angel of the Lord is fanciful, as the loss of such a huge force, never mind the credibility of such a number being used in the campaign of 701 BC, would have led to the collapse of the empire a lot earlier than 612 BC. Furthermore, Sennacherib and his army were recorded fighting a year later in Babylonia. This was always a hard-fighting theatre, which seemed to require the Assyrians to constantly field a large expeditionary force. Losses in Judah were clearly not so excessive as to prevent the Assyrian Army from intervening in Babylonia in the great strength that it did in 700 BC.

The humble conscripted light infantry that formed the bulk of the Neo-Assyrian Army were derived, in the main, from peasants serving their annual *ilku* duty as part of the annual levy. Before 745 BC Assyrian armies were ethnically homogenous, but as campaigns became far more wide-ranging under Shalmaneser III, they encountered more numerous and more powerful enemies – whether individually or in coalition. Despite the extent of his campaigning, the fact that there was no annexation of territories by Shalmaneser (other than Bit-Adini) meant that no units and troops belonging to foreign states were incorporated into the Assyrian Army.

That however changed profoundly with the advent of Tiglath-pileser III in 745 BC, as the annexation of defeated territories saw the selective incorporation of whole 'foreign' units into the Assyrian Army.

The emergence of a formal empire saw the need for a much larger manpower total, both to protect the newly conquered territories that had become provinces and to flesh out the army as the king embarked on more conquests farther afield. These were incorporated into what began to emerge as a multi-national army employing conscripted units on a large scale within both the professional *kisir sharruti* and the annual levies. Exemplars that can be offered to illustrate this are the Israelite troops that Tiglath-pileser took back to Nimrud with him after his campaign against Pekah of Israel in 732 BC and the Aramaean tribesmen he enlisted as auxiliary troops in 731 BC when campaigning in Babylonia. Indeed, the native forces conscripted by the king on this occasion were extensive, with no fewer than 20,000 archers and 10,000 spearmen from the tribe of Bit-Yakin. Another example is that of Sargon II, who enlisted 200 Samarian chariots and their crews in 720 BC following the final destruction of Samaria and the rump of the northern kingdom of Israel. From them Sargon tells us 'that he formed a unit' which went on to serve in the *kisir sharruti*.

This number would be added to when on campaign from those powers that still existed as client states, as they would be expected according to treaty to supply on demand their own military units to supplement the main Assyrian Army. This is how units from Judah, for example, found themselves involved in Esarhaddon's and Ashurbanipal's Egyptian campaigns in the 7th century BC. Although they operated alongside the Assyrian Army, they did not become part of it and would be released to return to their home land at the end of the campaign.

One of the possible motives for Tiglath-pileser III's decision to shift Assyrian policy abroad to an imperial model, forsaking the previous one of reducing defeated kingdoms to client states/vassals, was that it enabled the Assyrian state to take over and incorporate the armies of those defeated powers into its own military. This gave the Assyrian king access to a much larger pool of manpower and resources than in the pre-imperial period. This is why after 745 BC the Assyrian Army is better seen as a multi-ethnic force, with the cohorts from different regions reflecting their distinctive military culture, uniforms and equipment. Though we know that Sennacherib embarked upon a major reform of the Assyrian Army, part of which was the shift towards all military units serving in the army embracing a more 'Assyrian' appearance, this was a slow process. Indeed, it was still ongoing in the reign of Ashurbanipal, his grandson. Given the size of the army and the lack of any facilities for

the mass production of uniforms, arms and equipment, this was bound to take some time to achieve.

The number of military campaigns undertaken by the Assyrian Army is reckoned by Liverani to have encompassed at least one every two years. This estimate refers however to the major military campaigns and excludes the large number of local 'police' actions that Assyrian governors might need to have undertaken using troops under their command to suppress incipient revolts or uprisings in their domains. And if the record of such in other empires can be employed by way of comparison, then these may have been quite frequent and yet have never been recorded in the Annals, as there was little in the way of propagandistic value to have been derived from them. Nonetheless, such actions would have accrued losses. Notwithstanding the problems with estimating manpower losses for reasons pointed out above – the lack of real data points – Liverani offers the following analysis: 'Calculating (quite roughly) for an average of one campaign every two years, a total of 5,000,000 soldiers will have taken part in Assyrian expeditions – with human losses through attrition on campaign therefore amounting to roughly one million, tripling the estimate for Assyrian losses to 1,500,000.'

This is an extremely large number and even though it was amassed over the three centuries of the Neo-Assyrian state's existence – assuming it to be approximately accurate – it must have severely impacted on the population of the homeland. As members of a thoroughgoing militarist state par excellence, the male population of Assyria became habituated to warfare, with all other resources of the state harnessed to support its ongoing military activities. In consequence, there must have been a prolonged drain on the manpower of the prime age group that would have been recruited – that is the 18–30 age range – with a corresponding decline over the longer term of ethnic male Assyrians from the peasant population available to work in agriculture.

If this was the case, and the assumption must be that this process probably expanded from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III onward with virtually annual campaigns waged by this king, the age profile of male agricultural workers must have increased. This also accounts for the primary destination for many of the 'deported populations' being to Assyria proper, to take the place of the many ethnic Assyrian males who never returned, or who did and were too ill or disabled to return to their former tasks. That these incoming deportees 'were treated as Assyrians' meant that they too, in their turn, were called up into the army in fulfilment of their *ilku* duty. Such also probably accounts for the numerous, large-scale deportations that continued to take place down to the fall of the empire.

HORSE SUPPLY

From the emergence of the cavalry as an independent branch of the army in the 9th century BC through to the establishment of the Assyrian Empire under Tiglath-pileser III from 745 BC, this arm witnessed a major expansion in size and capability. The wide-ranging campaigns of this king and his successors led to a constant and ever-expanding demand for horses and other equids. Even though the infantry was to remain the largest branch of the army to the end of the empire, the cavalry arm grew in size and importance such that without the mobility it supplied to help respond to emergencies and embark upon wide-ranging campaigns it is doubtful whether the empire could have survived for as long as it did. Reliable and extensive horse supply was thus an absolute imperative to ensure the continued effectiveness of the Assyrian Army.

Even before the rise of the cavalry arm, horses were needed for what was the premier war-fighting instrument in the Army of the Middle Kingdom, the chariot. Although horses were taken as booty, they do not figure as often in the Annals of the Middle Assyrian kings as they do later in those of the neo-Assyrian monarchs. Tiglath-pileser I does record the capture of chariots and their teams and in Year Three of his reign he tells us that he imposed a tribute of 300 horses on the land of Sugi, which was beyond the Lower Zab River.

Apart from those acquired in war as booty or through tribute prior to the rise of the kingdom of Urartu in about 900 BC, one of the premier sources of horse acquisition for Assyria was the city-state of Gilzanu, which lay to the south of Lake Urmia and functioned as an emporium for the sale of horses from many different territories to the north and west of the Taurus Mountains. From those small kingdoms that made up the Nairi lands Assyrian kings prior to Ashurnasirpal led away great herds of horses as well as mules and other animals. However, with the formation of the kingdom of Urartu, Gilzanu and Nairi passed into the sphere of this new power, which moved to deny access to the Assyrians. Nonetheless, the Assyrians had become well acquainted with the quality of the horses that came from this region, and had a growing awareness of that to be found to the east of the Zagros on the Iranian plateau.

The Assyrian demand for horses grew between the 10th and 9th/8th centuries to service both the chariot and the nascent cavalry arm. The need to ensure the regular supply of a large number of horses became a strategic necessity. The demand for a larger number of horses, mules and donkeys increased alongside the raising of ever-larger numbers of cavalry formations. This is reflected in the frequency of mentions in the Annals of the later kings of Assyria, which recount the very large numbers of horses secured as booty and then required to be delivered to Assyria as tribute.

BELOW

The need for regular horse supply burgeoned from the 9th century BC onwards for the chariotry and expansion of the cavalry arm, as well as the constant need for replacement mounts following campaigns. Horses in such numbers could not be bred in Assyria, so it is likely that by far and away the majority of the horses illustrated on wall reliefs were acquired as booty and from the annual tribute levied on vassals. (Gianni Dagli Orti/Shutterstock)

The deployment and stationing of cavalry in the many fortified centres that were established by Assyrian kings as the empire expanded, such as the aforementioned fortified city of Tushan, saw horses being obtained from local areas and also supplied over larger distances from Assyria itself. This incurred losses in the process. We know from cuneiform documents that horses were lost not just to heat, but also extreme cold in the winters. It is not possible to accurately calculate the wastage of horses that were employed by the army, either as cavalry or for logistical purposes, but they must have been extensive, especially given the annual military campaigns waged by the Assyrian Army.

Operations in the very high temperatures of the campaigning season, often over 40 degrees centigrade, and ranging over hundreds of miles would have profoundly impacted upon the performance of the horses unless they had

OPPOSITE

Although horses predominated in tribute deliveries, mules, asses and donkeys also figured in significant numbers for use as transports for the army when on campaign. Horses were deemed to be too valuable for use in this role. As far as is known, horses were never employed for agricultural purposes in Assyria itself.
(Both images © The Trustees of the British Museum)

adequate access to water and fodder. In lands friendly to Assyria this could normally be assured, but once the army entered hostile territories this could become far more problematic. The wide-ranging nature of the Assyrian Army's operations over semi-desert, desert and mountainous terrain and other inimical environments led to a consequent wastage of horses due to injuries and exhaustion. An essential item of intelligence to be secured prior to a major operation was the knowledge of the rivers and the location of other water sources and sources of fodder in any area that was to be invaded. Nor was the horse at this time helped in its ability to master harsh terrain by the addition of horseshoes. Assyrian horses – whether employed for chariots or as cavalry – were never shod, and horseshoes did not appear in their earliest form until *c.*400 BC in Europe. These high loss rates must have been anticipated, and would have been made good in part by the incorporation of captured horses.

However this ability of the army to conduct both local and wider-ranging operations on an almost annual basis depended upon an extensive and reliable horse supply. This was to ensure that horses were available to be trained in the appropriate fashion in the homeland and provinces to pull chariots or operate as cavalry mounts. This was an ongoing process to maintain the supply of such trained horses given the size of the cavalary and chariot arms and the almost annual employment of them on campaign. The need for horses to be available to service the needs of the army in its annual campaigning also required a continual infusion of horseflesh to Assyria from other sources, already broken for riding and trained to the yoke.

Although it has been assumed that horses were bred within central Assyria, this may not have been the case. According to the eminent Assyriologist Karen Radner, 'Horses were never bred in central Assyria. This is due to the horse-breeding practice of that time. Horses were not bred in stables; instead, young animals were caught from herds of wild-living horses and broken, to be used as mounts and draft animals. As central Assyria was an agricultural region, keeping free-roaming horse herds was simply an impossibility.'

Although no doubt some horses were bred in Assyria in a limited way, it was simply impossible for the large numbers of horses required for the Assyrian Army on an enduring basis to have been even partially satisfied from within

the homeland itself. It is thus understandable why Assyrian monarchs were somewhat anxious in their concern for horse supply from beyond Assyria. Without those acquired from booty and tribute, they could not have maintained a cavalry arm in any real sense. Both the initial creation and later maintenance of the empire would not have been possible.

The two principal methods of acquiring horses were from booty and through tribute. A much smaller number of horses was 'gifted' to the Assyrian monarch by vassal kings and tribal chiefs, anxious to ingratiate themselves with him. Horses were also acquired, albeit in lesser numbers, through the levying of tax and purchase. Horses were 'levied' annually from within the empire post 745 BC through *ilku*, although the numbers obtained in this way were not large relative to those acquired from abroad. There were also horse merchants who supplied the Assyrian king with horses on a commercial basis, although once again, the numbers were small.

Acquiring horses, mules and donkeys through booty – resources taken from a defeated enemy – was always the most immediate means available to increase the army's campaign losses. Horses were always deemed by the Assyrian kings to be a priority acquisition, and the details of securing them figure prominently in their Annals. However, the numbers detailed often subsume those acquired through booty and those received as tribute and thus deliverable on an annual basis – the latter being a longer-term proposition. Although a separation of these two has been attempted below for the purposes of illustration, it is not always possible to separate the one from the other.

Horses from Booty

In the period down to the accession of Tiglath-pileser III, the acquisition of horses was a regular feature of the ongoing campaigns of the monarchs of the period. Thus Adad-nirari II captured horses and received more in tribute from the Aramaean kings of Bit-Bahiani, Qatnu and Karduniash. Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III both secured extensive horse booty and tribute. The former noted this many times in his Annals, with large numbers taken from the Aramaean kingdoms, as in the case of 460 horses secured from the nobles of Bit-Zamani. Shalmaneser III, unsurprisingly, secured far more as booty and through tribute by virtue of his wider-ranging campaigning in the lands to the west and north of the Euphrates. Virtually every kingdom he overran yielded horseflesh, as can be seen in the claim relayed proudly in his Annals that in the first 20 years of his reign he acquired 9,920 horses and mules and 19, 960 donkeys. Although these figures were large, they were frequently eclipsed by later Assyrian kings. It was in the imperial period that campaigning to the east of Assyria, into the Zagros and

ABOVE

Magnates and governors of provinces did not have carved reliefs to decorate the walls of their provincial palaces, but instead had paintings of very similar scenes. Here the king is seen on a lion hunt on a wall of the provincial palace at Til-Barsip. The blue of the horse is meant to represent a black coat. (Carlo Bollo / Alamy Stock Photo)

into the territory of the Medes, in what is today the mountains of western Iran and the Iranian plateau, assumed an even greater significance, with the reason being that this was the single most important source for horses for the Assyrians. A point of note is that these horses were never employed in agriculture.

The first designation of the Medes as a distinct people occurs in the reign of Shalmaneser III (858–824 BC) and is found on the 'Black Obelisk' of that monarch uncovered in the city of Nimrud by Austen H. Layard in 1846. This is to be found in the British Museum in London, with copies held in others. Dated to the year of 835 BC, it describes a campaign against the country of Namri and its king, Inazhu – a king who had been placed on the throne of that kingdom by Shalmaneser himself some nine years before. So Assyrian operations in western Iran and the encounter with the Medes predated the first mention of them on the obelisk. It was here the Median tribes raised and bred horses of very high quality and in very large numbers (this continued after the fall of the Assyrian Empire, with the Medes continuing to supply horses to the Achaemenid kings of the Persian Empire), and campaigns into this region became ever more frequent and on occasions were launched

specifically for the purposes of acquiring equine stock. Such would seem to have been the case with Adad-nirari III (810–783 BC) who launched no fewer than eight campaigns during his reign against the Median lands for the purposes of acquiring horses, but alas left no details of what took place during their course. These invasions took place in 809, 800, 799, 793, 792, 789, 788 and 787 BC, although another source indicates that those of 800 and 799 were actually directed at the non-Median territory of Mannaea, which had been the focus of Assyrian attention in earlier years and was also known as being a horse-raising territory.

It was this that no doubt prompted Tiglath-pileser III to create his first two provinces in the wake of his first Median campaign in 744 BC. He had campaigned in this region in 737 BC, securing 1,615 horses from the Medes. In that same year he dispatched his eunuch Ashur-da'inanni to relieve the Median tribes of more horseflesh in a predatory expedition which yielded one of the largest trawls of horses in Assyrian history up to that time – no fewer than 5,000 being brought back to the homeland. Following this, 18 Median tribal leaders sent horse tribute to the king. Large numbers of horses were also secured from the northern kingdom of Urartu and the Median lands during the campaigns of succeeding monarchs. The fact that so many of the Median tribes succumbed to Assyrian pressure and forcibly surrendered their valuable horse stock in the process was a direct consequence of their inability to unify politically and offer a united front to the marauding Assyrian Army. When that finally occurred from the mid-7th century BC, the consequence for Assyria was the probable denial of continued access to such large numbers of horses, with all that this implied.

In the meantime, in 714 and 713 BC Sargon II secured very large numbers of horses during his campaign against Urartu. Larger and smaller kingdoms and cities to the east and south of the Zagros dispatched 4,609 horses and oxen to Assyria. Sargon was effusive about the quality of the horses that came from this region and especially from Urartu:

'As to the people who live in that area in the land of Urartu… their like does not exist for skill with cavalry horses. The foals… which are reared for the royal contingents and caught yearly, until they are taken to the land of Subi [for training] and it is seen what they are capable of, will never have anyone straddling their backs.'

The Babylonian campaign of 709 BC yielded more equine largesse, with Sargon's army capturing 2,500 horses and 6,054 camels. Babylonia was a particular problem for Sennacherib throughout his reign, and he campaigned in the region on several occasions, in the course of which he seized a large number of horses as booty. In 704/703 BC he secured at least 7,200 horses and mules, 11,703 donkeys and 5,230 camels. As Tamas Dezso noted in Volume

III of his extensive and ongoing study of the Assyrian Army, this number of horses was sufficient to equip a full cavalry army, with the other animals providing a massive influx of resources to service the carriage of provisions and other resources. Sennacherib also secured many horses from the Levant and his campaign against Judah in 701 BC.

Sennacherib's successor Esarhaddon continued the Assyrian predations among the Median tribes and obtained huge numbers of horses from them as tribute, including numbers of 'large' thoroughbreds. It was during this king's 671 BC invasion of Egypt that the largest number of horses ever secured by the Assyrians occurred, with no fewer than 50,000 horses, many 'broken to the yoke', taken as booty. A particular note was made of the 40 plus stallions and horses that were captured and equipped with trappings of gold. This colossal number, which probably constituted almost the total equine stock of Lower Egypt at that time, did not however benefit Assyria proper, in that the animals could not be transported/driven to the homeland because of the distance involved. They were thus employed by Assyrian forces stationed in Lower Egypt and supplied to their allies.

Horses from Tribute

Tribute was levied by the Assyrian king as overlord on a subject city or kingdom. Tribute embraced more than just horses, but an essential part of whatever each state was obliged to deliver were elements that directly went to support the Assyrian Army, and horses were the paramount acquisition. Although the prime concern of the reports is horses, they also list delivery of mules – albeit far fewer in number.

Other than the Median tribes, city-states such as Bit-Zamani, Zamua, Mat Mannai, Gilzan, Tabal and Shubria also supplied horses. Shubria, which lay directly to the north of the fortified city of Tushan, would have been the primary source of horses for the army units serving there. After 745 BC horses were also levied from provinces within the empire.

Oversight of the provisioning of horses for the army was in the hands of specialist recruitment officers – the *musarkani* – and they were responsible for the replacement and supply of horses in the provinces. This was a significant role and a very careful tally was kept by them on the state of the horse supply within the provinces, with the information being fed through the bureaucracy to the king, who always concerned himself with this matter.

Following a rebellion in the south-eastern Zagros in 713 BC, some three years after a major military campaign there by Sargon II, the Assyrian monarch levied a tribute on Dalta of Ellipi, a client ruler of the Assyrians in the Zagros Mountains. He was required by virtue of his client relationship to the Assyrian

king to provide a stipulated number of equids, in his case 4,609 horses and mules as well as bulls and countless sheep and goats. There was a requirement that the annual delivery of tribute horses was brought from their source to Assyria without fail and at whatever time of the year.

It was here, in the capital city of Nimrud that bureaucrats probably based within the *ekal masharti* – the 'military arsenal' – drew up on clay tablets what archaeologists have come to call the 'horse reports'.

An example is the report from the reign of Esarhaddon (680–669 BC) used by the Assyriologist J.N. Postgate in his seminal work *Taxation and conscription in the Assyrian Empire*. It was created by Nabu-shum-iddina who was at the time '*hazannu* (mayor) of the temple of Nabu' in Nimrud. It was from here that the tablets originated, although they were discovered in Kouyunjik (Nineveh), which was the royal capital in the reign of Esarhaddon.These letters, probably dated to a single year of Esarhaddon's reign, suggest some close relationship between the commander of the *ekal masharti* and the mayor of the temple, where many of the horses were transferred. Nabu-shum-iddina received and reviewed the horses, forwarding the reports to the king at Nineveh on their numbers, breeds, origins and eventual disposition. The horses, some 3,000 in this single year, came from as far away as Parsua in Iran and Damascus and were destined to become either cavalry mounts or 'yoke horses', the latter ending up being employed on chariots.

The reports that Postgate drew upon cover the first three months of the year. The numbers of horses listed were destined for employment either for 'the yoke' or the cavalry, with just 787 of the total number of 2,725 being destined for the latter. Another report was sent to Esarhaddon listing the overall total number of equids as 2,911 of which 2,725 were horses, with just 136 being mules. The remaining 50 equids were not named.

Other horse lists were also discovered during the excavations of Nimrud in the 1950s. Large numbers of cuneiform tablets were found in room numbers NE 48 and NE 50, scattered in the debris on the floors. These were administrative in content. One of those consisted of records of musters of men, horses and mules registered under their commanders or under the names of provincial cities. The total numbers involved were often quite large, with over 2,000 horses and 67 mules being listed on the face of a single tablet. The assumption is that there were many more cuneiform tablets of this sort listing similar information that either have not survived or remain as yet undiscovered.

The Kouyunjik report, that utilized by Postgate, referenced details of several types of horses, the first of which was identified as Nubian/Kushite or Kusaean (also referred to by the Assyrians as 'Egyptian' horses). These horses did not necessarily come from the kingdom of Nubia, but this was where the breed originated. They are identified with those described by the Assyrians as 'large

ABOVE

What the Assyrians called 'great' or 'large horses' in Assyria appeared in some numbers in the 7th century BC. Their height was thought to have been about 15 hands, not so large by modern standards. They were issued to the heavy cavalry and are also seen pulling the large four-horsed chariots, which some have suggested were specially created to suit this size of horse.
(Photo by: Pictures From History/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

horses' and also 'great horses'. These first came to the attention of Tiglath-pileser III when he was campaigning in the Levant, when he was 'gifted' a number of 'Egyptian horses' by Hiram of Tyre and took others as booty after his capture of the Philistine city of Gaza, in addition to a large number of the more usual, smaller horses. Sargon II received 12 of these 'large horses' as a gift from the pharaoh Osorkon IV in 716 BC with the account describing this event, noting of the horses, 'that their like is not to be found in Assyria'. A further number were received by Sargon from Egypt ten years later as a gift following the dedication of his new palace in Khorsabad. In this instance, it was specified that they were 'trained to the yoke' – that is, for pulling chariots.

It was not until the reign of Sennacherib that this particular breed of horse is illustrated on wall-reliefs in that monarch's 'palace without rival' at Nineveh, harnessed to his chariot in the Lachish siege scenes. Employing the size of the

ABOVE

The artist here has been scrupulous in portraying the larger size of the horses used by later Assyrian chariots. The grooms are having difficulty trying to keep these horses under control. Note the studs on the wheel rims of the very large wheels of the chariot. Reign of Ashurbanipal. (Photo by: Universal History Archive/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

horse as depicted and setting them against the height of their attendants on the reliefs, it has been estimated that these 'great horses' stood about 15 hands high. It is clear then that employment of the terms 'large' and 'great' was a relative term and reflected the fact that most Assyrian horses up to that time – be they 'of the yoke' or ridden by cavalry – were much smaller. These 'large' horses – recognizable by their physical characteristics – were employed in growing numbers down to the time of the collapse of the empire. They are to be seen drawing Ashurbanipal's chariot both in war and on the wall-reliefs depicting his lion hunts and were renowned among the Assyrians both for their strength and stamina. It was their employment in larger numbers in the reign of Ashurbanipal that led to the development of the larger-wheeled four-man chariot seen in later wall reliefs.

The second horse type noted in the horse report cited by Postgate was the Mesaean. This was a type of horse that seems to have fallen out of use by the time of the Persian Empire, when the most common breed that came from the Medes

and delivered as annual tribute to the Achaemenid monarchs was the Nisaean – a breed that is also now extinct. It was known and used by the Romans, who praised it highly. A small number of this breed is also noted. However, in the horse list there are far fewer of the Mesaean than of the Kusaean. The name Mesaean derives from the name of the land of Mesu which lay to the east of Assyria in the Iranian uplands, and this breed came only from this area. It is thought that their rarity caused them to be held in great value by the Assyrians and that they were given on occasions to temples to be 'of service to the gods', although we cannot be certain what such service entailed.

Although not mentioned in this horse report, other breeds employed by the Assyrians included the Akhal-Teke, which unlike the Mesaean has not become extinct and is still reared in Turkmenistan. Until the appearance of the Nubian/Kusaean, this was probably the largest horse breed used by the Assyrians as a cavalry horse and stood at 14 hands high. These are in all probability the type of horses secured by Tiglath-pileser I in his raids on eastern Anatolia and the Nairi land. There is also visual evidence that another breed of horse, the small Caspian, was presented to the king of Assyria as a gift. However, apart from the few depictions on wall reliefs, they do not figure elsewhere.

INTELLIGENCE

Although the Assyrians never developed a dedicated intelligence body such as is possessed by all modern states as part of their defensive postures, the notion of 'know thine enemy' was as apparent to them as it is to us. The Assyrians had formidable access to intelligence concerning personages and events within their empire and beyond. This was essential to their ability to maintain the stability of the empire and identify emerging and actual threats and dangers that might warrant military action. All intelligence at this time was what is called nowadays as 'HumInt' – human intelligence garnered by spies and other persons.

Although the existence of intelligence acquisition – especially of political and military matters – was something that existed before 745 BC, it became far more sophisticated in the imperial period. Most of the cuneiform evidence for intelligence-gathering dates from this later period. It was also the case that the knowledge of the geography, the terrain and resources of those city-states or territories that were targeted by the Assyrians for the acquisition of resources, for example horses, was kept on file. This intelligence also covered many aspects of the cultures of the city-states, such as their languages, religious beliefs etc. This was necessary so that the Assyrians could exploit to the maximum their acknowledged capacity for psychological warfare. However, it was not the case that there existed anything like an Assyrian MI6 or CIA. There was no full-time 'intelligence service'. What intelligence was sent to the royal court, certainly in

the reign of Sargon II, was received by the crown prince Sennacherib, collated by him, and then sent on to the king, if he was on campaign.

Intelligence was acquired from a host of sources, and the most detailed documentation concerning intelligence acquisition and how it was carried out dates to the reign of Sargon II and his son Sennacherib when he was crown prince. It is probably fortuitous that we have many tablets dealing with intelligence dating from this king's reign, as it is likely that reports from operatives in vassal states and foreign states such as Urartu were not as developed in the reigns of other Neo-Assyrian kings. The same imperative that governed the reason for intelligence collection in the reign of Sargon II also applied to those others.

The intelligence collected by the Assyrians concerning Urartu in the reign of Sargon II provides a good example of how intelligence was acquired. Sargon's son and designated successor, Sennacherib, did not go on campaign with his father but stayed in Assyria in Nimrud, and it was here that the crown prince received, assessed and forwarded intelligence to his father, wherever he was campaigning.

One of the reasons for the friction between Urartu and Assyria had to do with the quest for resources – especially metal and timber. The region north of the Upper Tigris River, which included the Tushan (Ziyaret Tepe), Elazig, Bingol triangle, was of strategic importance to Assyria because of the forests of oak and poplar trees which were used both for military purposes as well as in the building of Sargon's new capital city of Dur-Sharrukin. Friction at the border with Urartu saw the latter attempting to block the movement of felled logs. This resulted in the outbreak of low-level conflict. Peter Dubovsky notes: 'Information about the development and results of the crisis was obtained from the report of the soldiers returning from the combat – a first-hand post-factum briefing that the Assyrian official Liphu Bel forwarded to the royal court' – thus making its way to Sennacherib.

The Assyrians also closely monitored the war between the Cimmerians and the Urartians, especially when in 715 BC Rusa I sustained a major defeat at the hands of the nomadic Cimmerians in battle, which led to the loss of many of his troops and several of his magnates. Reports flowed into the Assyrian court from seven different sources over a period of time, with the later ones being more detailed and more accurate. The substance of these and their salient points were incorporated into a summary report which was then sent by Sennacherib to the king. Sargon also received correspondence direct from one Ashur-resuwa, his representative in the state of Kumme, located in the north of the empire. It is very likely that this intelligence about the fate of the Urartian Army at the hands of the Cimmerians had a bearing upon Sargon's planned strategy for 714 BC, which ultimately saw the invasion of Urartu by the Assyrian Army.

Sargon was also party to much intelligence detailing the situation in Babylonia, and his invasion of 709 BC made extensive use of the reports made by pro-Assyrian Babylonians as well as his own officials and other agents concerning the strength and deployment of Merodach-baladan's forces.

Although we have no other cuneiform documentation detailing intelligence information of the sort dating from the reign of Sargon II, it is reasonable to assume that such reports existed. It was necessary to have the territories of the empire monitored at all times, as in the event of rebellion, steps would have to be taken to direct the operations of the main army to deal with it in the event it could not be suppressed by local forces. From other documentation we know that the court was in receipt of reports covering other matters, such as the horse reports.

In all probability, it was not just officials who were tasked with garnering such intelligence. Another invaluable source would have been the eyes and ears of Assyrian merchants who moved extensively throughout the empire on business, and it may well be they were charged with reporting back on anything that came to their notice as being untoward. It is known that Samaria, which became a centre for Assyrian operations after 720 BC, had an officer whose task it was to receive and compile reports on information received about conditions in Philistia, the southern Levant and Judah. It is from here that Sennacherib was given the information about the settlements in Judah, their size and wealth, and their fortifications as well as details concerning the storage of grain and other agrarian produce prior to the invasion of the country in 701 BC.

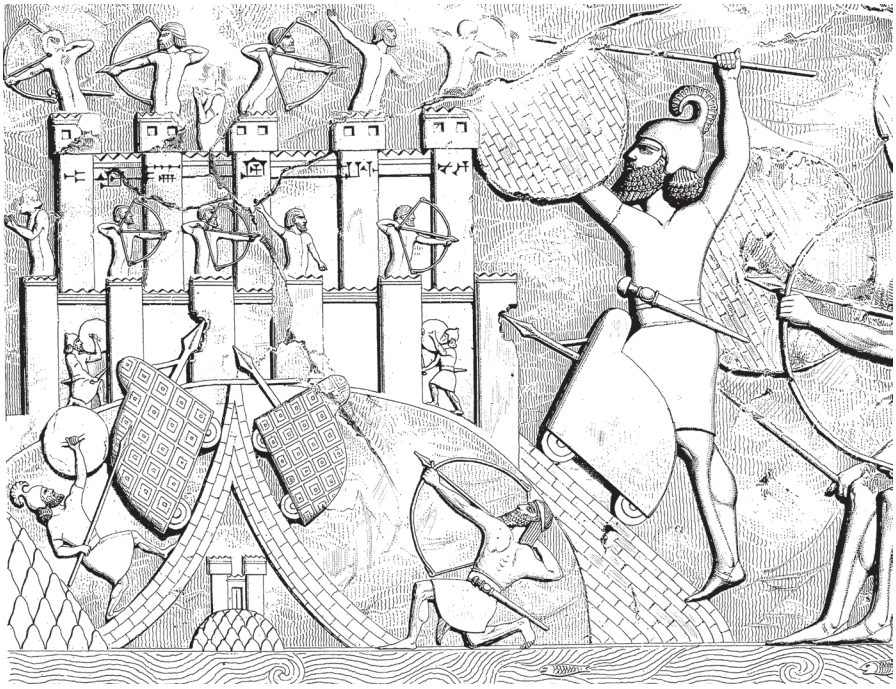
There is a basic principle at work here which obtains right through to the present. Armies of whatever period, to be effective in their operation, need as much intelligence of their potential enemies as possible. In this the Assyrians were as assiduous as any contemporary military force, allowing of course for the much more primitive forms of communications at that time. Although the Persians commonly get the credit for the creation of the rapid transmission of intelligence over long distance by horse messengers, as in other matters they drew upon Assyrian experience. This system was known as the 'King's Road' and was developed by the Assyrians as early as the 9th century. It was behoven upon local commanders/governors to provide for 'road stations' along the main routes linking through to the Assyrian capital. The Assyriologist Karen Radner notes: 'whenever a new province was added to the realm, it was one of the key challenges of the new administration to connect it to the King's Road. The road stations were either situated within exiting settlements or constituted settlements of their own, with the necessary agricultural basis to provide for personnel, envoys and transport animals.' This was also the preferred method whereby the magnates and governors communicated with the court.

SIEGE WARFARE

There was no aspect of warfare of which the Neo-Assyrian Army was deemed to be the master more than that of laying siege to fortified cities. The wall reliefs of the various monarchs of Assyria recovered by Layard and the Italian Paolo Emilia Botta, who as the French Consul in Mosul in 1842 began excavations at Nineveh, are replete with many scenes illustrating the Assyrian Army engaging in this practice. Indeed, it appeared that every campaign the Assyrian Army ever waged normally required one or more sieges. This was due to almost every kingdom or city-state that they ever attacked retreating behind walls they had constructed to defend against the onset of predatory invaders, and especially this rapacious northern Mesopotamian power.

The Neo-Assyrian Army probably undertook more sieges in the three centuries of the kingdom's existence than it did open field battles, and as such it developed a formidable expertise in the conduct of such operations – though essentially the same methods and equipment were being used in the 9th century by Ashurnasirpal as were by Ashurbanipal in the 7th century. Whilst it was the case that they refined the techniques they employed in conducting such operations, and improved the equipment they used in doing so, it is surprising that nowhere is there any suggestion that the Assyrian Army developed projectile siege weapons of the type employed by the Greeks and Romans. They certainly possessed all the materials and the necessary technology to have done so, but in seeking an explanation for why they did not, either the concept of torsion was unknown to them or it might be worth observing that for all their prowess in war, the Assyrians were essentially conservative in the manner whereby they responded to change. This was a characteristic of ancient Near Eastern culture generally. However, we do have evidence that the Assyrians were intimately familiar with all the various methods that could be employed to gain entry into a city that had shut its gates against them. Apart from images of the wall reliefs illustrating sieges, another sources have come down to us in the form of cuneiform documents, and date primarily from the reigns of Esarhaddon and his son, Ashurbanipal.

Specifically, they are of questions put to the oracular gods – particularly Shamash and Adad – that would yield answers concerning events pertaining to the near future. Their answers would be revealed, if at all, in the livers of sheep that had been slaughtered so that priest/diviner could read from it and secure an answer to the posed question, a procedure being called *extispicy*. Among the very many examples of this type of document are those that are specifically concerned with forthcoming sieges, and the questions that are put to the god specify the ways and means of capturing a city and for our purposes help elucidate the range of methods employed by the Assyrian Army for doing so. The methods described range from the pacific – that is negotiation –



ABOVE

A drawing made by Botta and Flandin in the 1850s based on a wall relief in Dur-Sharrukin showing the army of Sargon II laying siege to a city. Two separate types of battering ram are used – two of one type seen in the centre are covered with protective metal plates, while the other on the right is without these. There would seem to have been purpose-built ramps created for them to move on. The warriors depicted are auxiliary Neo-Hittites. Of note are the two sappers standing against the lower walls of the fortress using their daggers to prise away the sun-baked bricks. (Author's collection)

through to the classic form of blockade and siege. Examples include: 'Will [name of city given] fall through negotiations or fearfulness and pressure? Through a blockade? By waging war and effecting a breakthrough either by the use of siege towers, scaling ladders, siege ramps or by battering rams? Or by a tunnel or a breach in the walls? By the use of water or fire or by a ruse?'

In their entirety – and there are certainly more than have been listed here – what these questions provide is a virtual guidebook to the very different methods that the Assyrians employed in capturing enemy cities. It was also the case that such responses were always time limited, that is that they applied only to so many days into the future.

OPPOSITE TOP

A very famous scene of a siege from the reign of Ashurnasirpal. The king is shown wearing his court apparel – most unlikely as we know that on campaign he wore (as did other kings) his 'battle armour'. He is protected by two shield-bearing guards while to the rear is a eunuch page. In the foreground we have the domed, six-wheeled battering ram. It is a heavy machine constructed in pre-fabricated sections and, when assembled, covered with wicker shields. Behind it is a siege tower which is taller than the battering ram engine. An archer, protected by another soldier carrying a shield, tries to keep the parapets of the fortress clear. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)

OPPOSITE BOTTOM

The photo of the relief in this image was used by the artist as the basis for the preceding plate, which is an interpretation/ reproduction of the same scene. The artist has made certain assumptions about the size of the siege engine and the siege tower, but the finished image is a fair interpretation by the artist of how it might have appeared in actuality. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Nonetheless, although we consider the different methods employed by the Assyrians when laying siege to a city under separate headings, they employed these techniques together. For example, in the Annals of Ashurnasirpal II, the king speaks of laying siege to the city of Kaprabu: 'I conquered the city of Kaprabu by tunnels, battering rams and siege towers'.

We can therefore assume that whenever the Annals speak of a king laying siege to a city, several different methods were employed to breach the walls.

Although the Assyrians developed a remarkable facility in siege warfare, in practice when on campaign they preferred to avoid sieges whenever possible. Sieges by their very nature were time-consuming, resource-intensive and carried with them risk for the besieger as well as the besieged. The longer a siege or blockade lasted, the greater the risk for the besieging army from contingencies such as sickness and disease. Many of the larger cities of the city-states against whom the Assyrians fought had built formidable and sophisticated defences around themselves. This was especially the case with smaller powers, who, unable to field large armies, were unwilling to risk all on the battlefield and so sought their salvation in the thick walls that they had built. Provision was also made for the storage of foodstuffs in large quantities and a constant water supply was available within the walls so that if possible a prolonged siege could be seen through. This was the strategy that Hezekiah of Judah had embraced in preparing for the Assyrian invasion of his country in 701 BC.

ABOVE

A very fine image of an Assyrian siege that has all the hallmarks of how the siege of Lachish would have looked. It combines all the elements of the methods used by the Assyrian Army of the 7th century. Siege engines assail the city gates while auxiliary troops assault on ladders. (© Steve Noon)

However, we know that many prolonged sieges resulted in appalling conditions arising from hunger and thirst and then disease spreading among the populace of the besieged city, with of course the ordinary folk and the poorest suffering the most. Food supplies would be prioritized for the higher levels of society and the troops. Nonetheless, because animal mouths would need to be fed with the same grains as were consumed by the besieged populace, they were dispatched quite early on, with people gorging on the meat in a fashion that they never did in more peaceful times. As the siege continued, the populace would need to resort to 'ersatz' food, this probably being the last stage before full starvation. Boiled leather, rats, cats and even more disgusting sources were utilized. So the longer any siege went on the more the population would suffer. The degree of suffering being experienced – with social taboos being broken in the face of the sheer need to survive – is well described in a generic passage relating the experience of a besieged population in the Near East from the Tanakh/Old Testament and the Book of Lamentations, Ch4 vs 9-10.

> Happier those killed by the sword
> than those killed by famine:
> they waste away, sunken
> for the lack of the fruit of the earth.
> With their own hands, kindly women
> cooked their own children;
> this was their food.

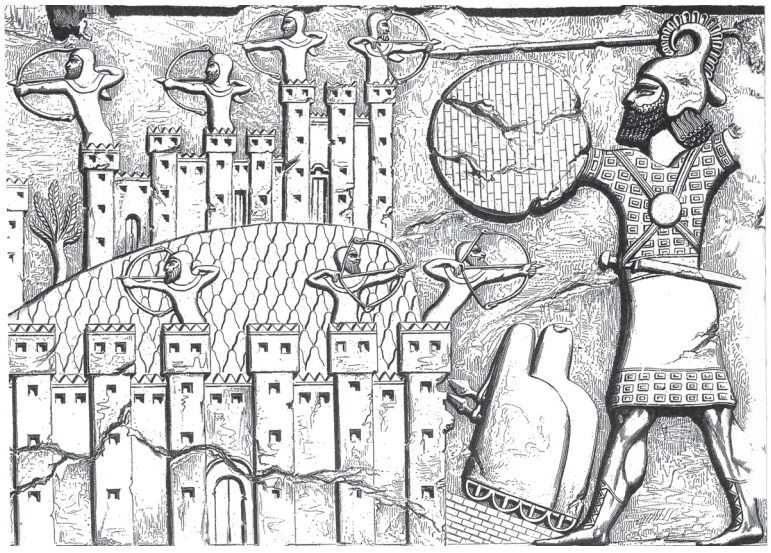
This certainly occurred during Sennacherib's siege of Babylon in 689 BC and Ashurbanipal's siege of the same city in 648 BC, the latter being longer than the first and leading to a terrible famine among the besieged populace.

The unwillingness to surrender once a siege began stemmed from a realization of the treatment of survivors after the city finally fell. Many among the populace were massacred and those who survived were deported to Assyria or some other part of the empire. However, it needs to be borne in mind that the fate of survivors in any city under siege and blockade, once the opportunity to surrender had not been taken, was also dire. This outcome applied in almost all cultures in the Ancient World and through until recent times. The Persians, Greeks, Romans et al. were no different at all in their response to intransigence on the part of a city that forwent the opportunity to surrender. That decision sealed their fate.

Siege Engines

The need to break into an enemy city saw the development of a variety of siege engines by the Assyrian Army. The number of different types witnessed on wall reliefs from the reigns of Ashurnasirpal through to Ashurbanipal suggests an ongoing development of types to suit the needs and circumstances of the army, although conceptually they differed not at all over this period. Although the housing differed, all employed a battering ram. The growth of the empire, and the corresponding greater area of operations for the Assyrian Army, meant that such siege engines needed to be transportable, and this would have required them to have been constructed in easily transportable sections and carried as part of the logistics train. They were thus, to use a modern expression, modular in design. The notion that they were constructed *in situ*, at the site of the siege and employing materials drawn from the hinterland of whatever city was being laid siege to, is possible but unlikely.

The wall reliefs do show a variation in design over the period of three centuries, but the difficulty arises in that the artists made no attempt to draw to scale. It is therefore problematic in trying to assess how large these machines actually were. The example shown on p. 252, dating from the reign of



ABOVE

In another drawing of a wall relief from Sargon II's palace at Dur-Sharrukin, a similar siege scene is depicted. The city wall is being assailed by armoured, solid-wheeled siege engines which are depicted demolishing the baked mud brick walls. They are employing specially built siege ramps of the sort described in detail in the later account of the siege of Lachish. The defenders are also under attack by Assyrian auxiliary archers and spearmen. (Author's collection)

Ashurnasirpal II, is set alongside the original wall relief showing the siege scene and highlights how the artist interpreted the image to produce the illustration. The siege engine appears to be either a battering ram or a blade at the end of the body of the ram. In the case of the former, it is probably a long tree trunk, cut down locally where the siege was taking place, with a metal point at its tip. The ram, which was suspended by ropes or perhaps chains from a structure in the roof of the siege engine, would be moved backwards and forwards like a pendulum by the crew within the engine. The farther back they could move the ram, the greater the momentum and thus the kinetic energy imparted to its metal head when it struck the wall. As most walls in Mesopotamia were constructed of sun-baked clay – weaker than stone – the impact directed at one point time after time by the ram would cause it to fracture. Those who constructed such devices, and the crews who manned them, would have been fully aware of the best angles for the ram to be employed.

Alternatively, and this is suggested by the illustrations of the siege engines used in Ashurnasirpal's time, the long trunk could have employed a large,

wedge-shaped blade which would be inserted between the courses of sun-dried brick and moved from side to side to dislodge them. However, it has to be said that the more likely device employed was the ram because it was both easier to use and to manufacture *in situ*.

The use of any siege engines deploying a ram would have been screened by a large number of archers and slingers, whose task was to ward off the defenders on the walls above where it was being used. On several Assyrian wall reliefs defenders can be seen dropping various objects onto siege engines. This would also have extended to boiling oil, burning chariot bodies and other impedimenta – indeed anything that could be used to deny the enemy success. Depending on the progress made by the rams – in the plural because certainly more than one would be employed, as can be seen in the Lachish reliefs – where and when it was ascertained that a breach was in the offing, assault troops would be readied to rush it as soon as the wall crumbled. How rapidly the assaulting troops could then break into the city through the breach was directly related to how quickly the defenders could respond to a breach's creation. At that point it all boiled down to the bravery and effectiveness of the defenders versus that of the Assyrian attackers. But in most cases, it would seem that once such a breach had been made it was very difficult to stop the Assyrian assault troops from breaking into the city proper.

Assault by Ladders

The most frequently illustrated method for overcoming defensive city walls was that of the use of assault ladders, a method employed from ancient times through to the Napoleonic Wars. The attraction of this method was that, if successful, it gave the attacker the most rapid ingress to the city. Indeed, one of the key bits of intelligence to be acquired before any major campaign would have been how many fortified settlements were there to be taken, and how high were their walls?

It is very likely that the many assault ladders seen on the wall reliefs were brought to the site of the intended siege already constructed. Too much time, effort and energy would need to be expended by the Assyrians in constructing them *in situ*, even assuming of course that the raw materials were to hand. Such ladders would need to have been constructed to be able to reach the tops of the wall, allowing for the wide angle – somewhere between 25 and 46 degrees – that they were placed against. This was to enable Assyrian soldiers to scramble up the ladders without using their hands, and they are shown ascending with shields in the left hand and spears in the right. This would be no easy matter and it must be assumed that those who led the assault in this fashion had been trained to do so.

Those Assyrian soldiers shown assaulting the walls using ladders, such as those from the reign of Sargon II, are wearing the helmets and clothing used by auxiliary troops. This would make sense in that there was probably a perception among the military leadership that these troops were both numerous and expendable in a way that native Assyrian troops were not. It is not completely out of the question that those first up the assault ladders formed a sort of 'forlorn hope', prompted by the possibility of reward and awards which we know Assyrian soldiers did receive. We can envisage many of these storming units ascending numerous ladders to reach the top at speed to divide the defenders and disperse their strength. Of course, not all the assault teams would have been successful and there may well have been high losses. What mattered, however, were those who did make it beyond the walls and onto the parapet. Unless the defenders were on their toes and reacted quickly, then they could be overwhelmed by surprise. Overhead covering fire was provided by many archers from behind high vertical shields, aiming to disable or kill as many of the defenders as possible.

It is reasonable to assume that because speed was always a feature of Assyrian military operations, the use of assault ladders was probably the most common means of gaining access to a walled city. And it was only where the Assyrian Army found itself engaged in a long siege, primarily when assaulting walls constructed of stone or at least extremely thick walls of multiple layers of dried mud brick as in the case of Arpad, Damascus, Samaria, etc., that they resorted to employing their siege machines.

Tunnelling

Tunnelling was another siege tactic used, though not depicted as often on the wall reliefs. Our earliest mention of it comes from Ashurnasirpal's short description of how his army took the city of Kaprabu.

In essence, the purpose of tunnelling was to obviate the need to attack the walls at all by digging underneath them and then breaking up out inside the city itself. Although not technically tunnelling, but subsumed within the heading, is the alternative method of attacking the bricks on the lowest part of the wall to remove them and generate a gap, which could then be enlarged to help create a hole through which soldiers could then enter or to help collapse the wall above the hole. This would create a bigger breach over which attacking soldiers could clamber and gain entrance. There are several wall reliefs dating from Ashurnasirpal's reign where it is possible to see both methods being employed.

WEAPONRY

The Bow

No Assyrian bows or arrow shafts have survived in the archaeological record. As they were made of wood and thus organic, their fate has been to rot in the ground. Indeed, the very few bows that have survived from the Ancient Near East predate the Neo-Assyrian Empire and were found in the tomb of Tutankhamun (1333–1323 BC), discovered in 1921 in the Valley of the Kings by the archaeologist Howard Carter. These survived only by virtue of being protected in the sealed atmosphere of the young pharaoh's tomb. Nonetheless, there is enough visual material on the wall reliefs of the Neo-Assyrian kings from Ashurnasirpal through to Ashurbanipal to convey the point that for these monarchs the bow was more than simply a weapon. When seen in their hands, it was a symbol of much more.

THE BOW AS SYMBOL OF ROYAL POWER

From as early as the 3rd millennium BC, the bow was illustrated and spoken of in texts as being the weapon carried by the gods and regarded as a divine symbol. In Babylon, the god Marduk is referred to in a number of texts as wielding one and letting loose 'merciless arrows' in the mythological story of how 'with his bow in his hand' he battled the god Ea and cast him down. For the Assyrians, depictions of winged gods wielding bows are seen from the 1st milennium. The earliest example we have dates to the 11th century BC and is seen on the Broken Obelisk attributed to the reign of Ashur-bel-kala (1074–1057 BC). On it there is an image of a deity identified as the god Shamash. Two hands are descending from a winged disc representing the god, and a bow is being grasped in the deity's left hand and is touching the hands of the king. Thereafter, and especially from the reign of Ashurnasirpal onward, winged discs both holding bows and shooting arrows are to be found on a number of his wall reliefs. The assumption is they represent the presence of Ashur, or perhaps Samas, in battle aiding the king.

For the Neo-Assyrian kings the bow was the pre-eminent weapon, the most efficacious symbol of both their military power and also their individual martial prowess. In many of the reliefs on palace walls the king is shown bow in hand. The mere possession of the bow conveys the most profound symbolic meaning – that of the gods having selected this or that Assyrian monarch to be king, having imparted to him the mandate to conquer and

defeat his enemies abroad and thus extend the authority of the god Ashur. It was the king's possession of the bow in his hand that communicated that he had been given this mandate and provided with the means – that is the army – to do so. The kings themselves were quite cognisant of this. Sennacherib tells us: 'I took in my hand the mighty bow that Ashur had granted me and I grasped in my hand the arrow that cuts off life.'

In similar vein, his son Esarhaddon stated that when he became king, 'I held in my hands the mighty bow and the strong arrow, which the god Ashur, king of the gods, placed in my hands.'

A recurring image, albeit not utilized by all Assyrian monarchs, is the king seen with a bow in one hand and two arrows in the other. These not only symbolize the power of the Assyrian Army but also the military prowess of the king. It is Ashurnasirpal II who is seen most often carrying these and in a variety of contexts, not all military. Often the king is on his throne and is seen with the bow and arrows in his hands as prisoners are presented to him. In the Lachish reliefs, Sennacherib is seen on his throne overseeing the siege of the city with his senior officers standing in front of him. With his feet resting on a footstool, he holds his bow in his left hand and two arrows in his right. Only Sargon II and Ashurbanipal are not seen wielding the bow and arrows in this fashion to any degree.

The Bow as the Premier Military Weapon

Throughout the period from the 9th century through to the fall of the empire in the 7th century BC, the bow was the premier weapon used by both infantry and cavalry in the Assyrian Army as well as their opponents. Some indication of this can be inferred from the number of archers of defeated kingdoms and city-states conscripted into the army by the Assyrian kings. Tiglath-pileser III enlisted 20,000 archers during his 13th campaign in Babylonia along with other troops. Sargon II drafted the same number of archers after defeating Muttalu, king of Kummuh. Sennacherib reports that in his western campaign of 701 BC he added 10,000 bowmen to his royal corps and a further 30,000 bowmen in his 695 BC campaign to the same part of the Levant. In his later war against Elam he conscripted 30,500 bowmen from the defeated Elamite Army. Tamas Dezso opines that these enlistments of archers under Sennacherib were 'probably added to the Assyrian Army as auxiliary forces to serve on a seasonal basis during a single campaign and… not enlisted into the Assyrian Army as regular units'. Ashurbanipal stated in his inscription concerning the second attack on Elam that, following its defeat, he incorporated 'the men of the bow and shield

ABOVE

The most important weapon of the Assyrian Army, indeed of all armies in the Ancient Near East, was the bow. In its unstrung form the angular composite bow resembled a flattened 'W' in appearance. The process of stringing the bow may well have required two men, and this was illustrated on at least one Assyrian wall relief. (By kind permission of Mike Loades from his book *War Bows* (Osprey, 2019) Photograph Kim Hawkins)

and captains and heavy armed bowmen, whom I carried off from Elam, I added to my royal establishment'. These are not insignificant numbers, and lend credence to the central importance of the bow and massed archery to all the armies of the ancient Near East in this period.

The quantity of bows acquired by the Assyrians through booty and tribute could be quite prodigious. The largest example of the former is a brief reference to a grand total of 36,242 bows that had been inspected. It is thought that such numbers would have been acquired either from the Elamites, possibly after Ashurbanipal's second devastating campaign against that kingdom, or from the Chaldaeans.

In that case this would be dated to *c*.647/646 B.C. In either case, the bow was the primary weapon used by their armies. An example, it is thought, of tribute is the 784 bows that came to Assyria from Arpad. These are, however, merely examples of other deliveries made by tributary kingdoms – this was an important source of bows for the Assyrian Army.

As well as using the bow as a medium-range weapon, the Assyrians also employed it as a close-range weapon in support of spear-carrying infantry. Indeed, given the small size of the swords worn by most Assyrian troops – more akin to daggers – it is unsurprising that we see bows being used in close order melees and battles. On the highly detailed wall reliefs from the reign of Ashurbanipal showing the battle of Til-Tuba (653 BC), Assyrian and Elamite troops are using bows in close combat. On other reliefs, armoured archers from the *kisir sharruti* are seen being given protective cover by shield bearers. This would seem to have been a normal tactic for Assyrian infantry operating in pairs or threes: an archer, a shield bearer and on occasions a spearman.

The bow type used by the Assyrians, whether on foot or mounted, was the angular bow and, according to M. Loades in his book *The Composite Bow*, is a candidate for being one of the first examples of its type. Its provenance goes

back to the late 3rd millennium BC. It is this type of bow that is carried by the Akkadian king Naram-Sin on a stele which records his victory over a people called the Lullabi. According to the Israeli archaeologist Yigal Yadin, the two features of the bow carried by Naram-Sin which reveal its composite construction is that it is quite short – about 90 centimetres (3 feet) in length – and that its arms recurve towards and then away from its centre.

The basis of the bow was a single piece of wood to which was glued horn and the tendons of oxen. These were laminated together using fish or hide glues. These had the strength and pliability to bond the tendons and the horn. The latter had a degree of inherent springiness which worked with the tendons, and especially the glue, to enable the bow to release its spring. It has been speculated that the draw weight of the composite bow employed by the Assyrians was at least 70lb. Loades explains that 'the wooden core remained important to hold the bow in shape, in particular resisting torque, and although it continued to assist in the delivery of elastic power, its main function was to act as a framework for the bow.'

Unstrung, the angular bow was essentially linear in appearance. This is seen in the examples recovered from the tomb of Tutankhamun. For the Assyrians, the use of the angular bow went back to the second millennium, and by the time we get to the Neo-Assyrian period, this bow is in use from Egypt through to the Levant, Syria, Anatolia and Urartu. Such was the ubiquity of this weapon in the Ancient Near East that the Assyrians had no problem integrating the vast number they captured or that were delivered to them as part of tribute into their army.

Prior to 745 BC, bows and their arrows produced for the Assyrian Army were manufactured within Assyria itself through the *ilku* taxation system. After this date very large numbers were produced throughout the provinces under the same system. Added to these of course were those acquired, as we have seen in some cases in exceptionally large numbers, through booty. As the primary weapon used by the Assyrian Army, the bow must have been manufactured in numbers approaching the millions over the period of the empire.

Although it might seem obvious, the use by the Assyrians of the shoulder quiver for both infantryman and mounted heavy cavalry permitted the archers a more rapid and sustained fire than before. As with bows, wooden quivers have not survived and only metal quiver covers have been recovered. However, in the archaeological excavations at Nimrud a bronze quiver of some 44cm (17in.) in length was recovered, which is thought to date from the 7th century. The back and base of the quiver were constructed of another material, probably wood. Reference to quivers carried by soldiers in the wall reliefs indicate that many were decorated, in some cases highly so with geometrical or floral designs.

Arrowheads have been recovered in quite large numbers and were manufactured almost exclusively from iron. Some 630 have been recovered from several Assyrian sites, with the most coming from Fort Shalmaneser in Nimrud. These evidence a number of different shapes, although the prevalence of the 'slender, leaf-shaped arrowhead' suggests that this was the common type used by the Assyrian Army.

The Spear, Javelin and Lance

The spear as used by the infantry was about nine feet long and employed as a thrusting weapon. There seems little evidence from the reliefs that Assyrian soldiers employed their spears as throwing weapons. To have done so, as the Romans did with their *pila*, would have required the Assyrian infantry to have been equipped with a more formidable sword than that with which they are to be seen employing. The Assyrians' use of long daggers is a clear indication that they were not regarded as the main weapon. Many of the reliefs, in particular those from the battle of Til-Tuba, show the bow and spear as the main weapons used in close combat. The infantry using the latter are shown employing their spears as overarm thrusting weapons. Tests reconstructing the performance of ancient weaponry show that, with the weapon itself weighing some 1.5lb, it would generate an impact energy of about 70.8 feet per second. The force needed for a spear point to penetrate 2mm of bronze body armour to a killing depth was 137 foot pounds and 228 foot pounds for iron armour. Either type of armour thus provided a fair degree of protection. In most cases, the Assyrian infantry found itself fighting enemy counterparts who did not wear armour and, even as late as the battle of Til-Tuba, the Elamite infantry are rarely seen in it. When this was the case, the energy imparted by a downward thrust was more than adequate to kill.

Javelins were also employed by the Assyrians as throwing weapons from chariots, most likely after the arrows had been used up. However, these are not seen often. It has been suggested that some of the smaller spearheads that have been recovered actually come from javelins or lances, the latter used by cavalry.

No whole spears have been recovered by archaeologists as the wooden shaft of the weapon would have perished in the ground, but a number of spearheads have survived. The total is not great – 27 late Assyrian spearheads were found in Nimrud, one at Kouyunjik in Nineveh and a number at a site called Sharif Khan. Some were socketed, with the spearhead heated and forced onto a shaft, the subsequent cooling of the socket causing the spearhead to contract onto it. In other cases, the remains of rivets used to secure the spearhead to the wooden shaft can be seen.

The spearheads themselves are of six different designs, with nearly half of the total having a leaf-shaped blade. John Curtis in his book *Late Assyrian Metalwork* notes that these vary in length, from the shortest at 15.75cm (6in.) long to 31.8cm (12.5in). The variety of spear blades suggests there was no uniformity in type, as they reflected the traditions of where they were produced. A blade produced in Nimrud would in all probability look different from one produced in Damascus, although the prevalence of the leaf shape does suggest that this was an easier design to produce in volume. Variations in shape shown on the wall reliefs could also reflect an accurate rendering of what actually was the case, or mere artistic licence.

The Dagger and Sword

On all reliefs Assyrian soldiers are shown carrying daggers as a secondary weapon. Some 17 of these weapons have been located in Assyrian settings, although some are quite eroded. Of these one is bronze and the rest iron,

OPPOSITE

Paradoxically, while we have very few remains of Assyrian swords and daggers, those older weapons made of bronze have been recovered. These two examples have been included because it has been observed that many later swords and daggers draw upon the designs of the earlier as masters for the iron weapons when being constructed. (Lanmas / Alamy Stock Photo)

with the latter found with tangs and iron rivets that would have been used to secure the handle.

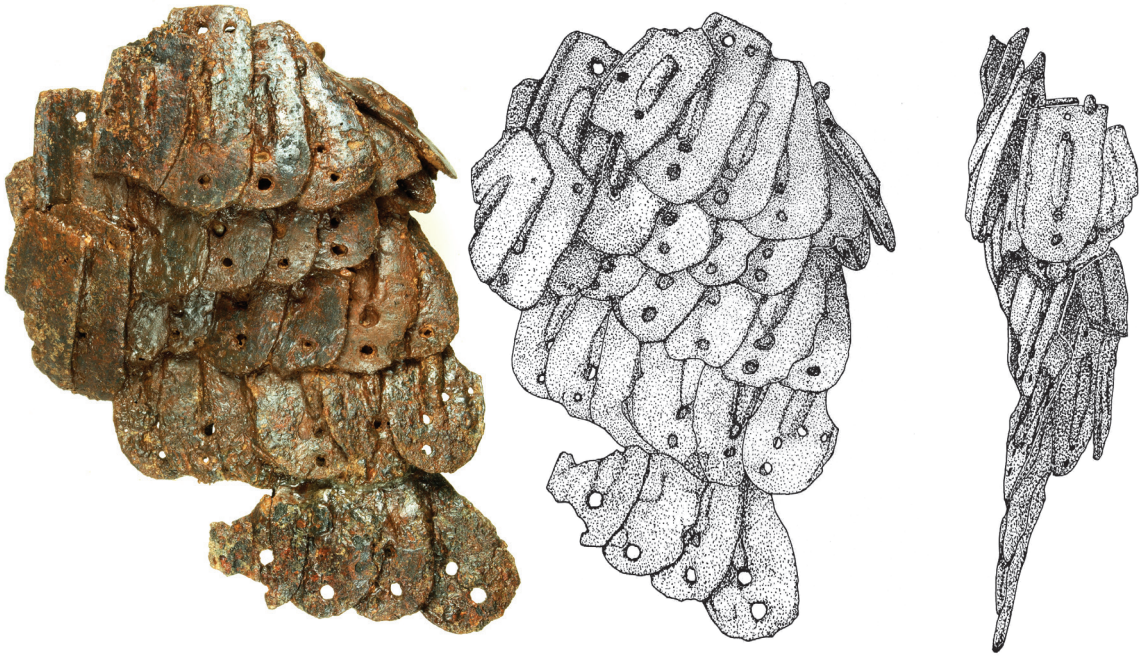
These daggers are shown on the wall reliefs being used for stabbing or decapitating the enemy – alive or dead! They are also seen being employed by soldiers as tools for prying out baked bricks in city walls during sieges.

Swords, however, are longer than even the long daggers, but did not seem to exceed 55cm (22in.) in length and were not as common as long daggers. Whereas the latter were used primarily as stabbing weapons, the sword was also used as a slashing weapon. Only four late Assyrian swords have been recovered by archaeologists and all were constructed of iron, one of these being recovered from Nimrud. It is at Nimrud that images of eunuch courtiers can be seen on the walls, each of whom is carrying a sword for ceremonial purposes.

Armour

Armour can be seen quite early being worn by heavy infantry on the wall reliefs of Ashurnasirpal and is also seen being worn by heavy infantry on the Balawat Gates. Assyrian infantry of the *kisir sharruti* wore lamellar armour from the late 9th century onwards. By the second half of the 8th century from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III onward until the end of the empire, such armour is far more common. This was worn primarily in the form of a torso-covering lamellar shirt. It was also worn by heavy cavalrymen from this period onward. Although we have no documentation, it must be assumed that in the imperial period the production of this armour was carried out in the primary military centres of each province and that those responsible for its production probably did so as part of their *ilku* duties. There is no sign of any smelting facilities in the *ekal masharti* in Nimrud, and it must be assumed that this part of the process was carried out in the town/city in workshops.

The lamellar armour was primarily constructed of iron plates, although examples of bronze and even copper plates have also been found. The latter two were mainly produced before iron became the normal metal for this purpose.



ABOVE

Iron scale armour was recovered from the long-term archaeological dig at Ziyaret Tepe, ancient Tushan in modern Turkey. To provide a clearer notion of the nature of the scale armour, the photo is set alongside a drawing of the same by Dr Paola Pugsley. Clearly seen are the holes through which the lacing would be threaded to attach each scale to another and to its backing material.
(The Ziyaret Tepe Archaeological Project)

However, it is unlikely given the number of lamellar shirts worn from the 9th century onwards that a time was ever reached where copper/bronze lamellar armour was totally eclipsed in its use by iron. The rather glib statement found in quite a number of publications that the Assyrians used 'all iron' equipment, as if there was no bronze equipment still being employed, is erroneous. Work-hardened bronze daggers were quite robust and it is likely that surviving weapons of this type might still have been issued to auxiliary troops.

It is thought that a completed lamellar shirt weighed between 30 and 35 pounds. Many examples of lamellar scales have been recovered from such sites as the *ekal masharti* in Nimrud, where the vast majority of Assyrian scales have been found. In the 1949–63 expeditions to the city some 400 bronze and 600 iron scales were recovered. The shape of these scales was generally rounded at one end or else rectangular. Down the centre of all was an embossed rib and there were holes on them to facilitate them being sewn together. The scales were not

of a uniform size or type and the observation was made by J. Curtis that 'it was likely that scales of various types were used to make up one suit of armour'. The most likely material employed for 'lacing' the scales together was leather – indeed, one example has been found where the remains of the leather is still *in situ* on the scales. However, it is noted by J. Curtis that there 'is no special provision for the attachment of scales to a backcloth'. This then distinguishes lamellar armour from scale armour, which, though made from metal scales, is attached to a backcloth. Scale armour is rarely seen being worn on the reliefs but it was worn alongside the much more common lamellar armour.

Helmets

A variety of helmets was worn by soldiers who served in the Assyrian Army between the 9th and the 6th centuries BC, and a number of fragments have been found in Assyria. Only one complete helmet is extant and that is in the British Museum. It is made of iron and is the classic helmet with a pointed top to it. It was lined with material, probably leather, to allow it to be worn with a degree of comfort.

It was this helmet that was a distinctive feature of Assyrian troops, and by the last century of the empire and with the ongoing reforms to the appearance of the military nearly all troops serving with the army would have worn this type of helmet. Each helmet was manufactured by a blacksmith, hammering it out over a former, from a single sheet of iron. The design was optimized for protection, in that drawing the top of the helmet to a point not only reduced its area but also increased its ability to deflect incoming arrows and the downward blows of any enemy sword. Later helmets of this type are also seen with hinged earflaps or produced with earflaps as an extension and integral to the helmet.

From the reign of Tiglath-pileser III onwards, the introduction of auxiliary troops of Neo-Hittite or Aramaean origin saw soldiers wearing helmets of native design reflecting the traditions of their origins and also based on Urartian designs. In the case of the former, the helmet bowl has integral ear protection, but the top of the helmet is surmounted by metal combs of various types, some of which carry coloured feathers or coloured materials. These features were common to auxiliary troops down to the 6th century, although certainly by the time of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal the drive towards the army being equipped with common uniforms saw the adoption of the conical Assyrian helmet by auxiliary troops.

A second type of Assyrian helmet, seemingly worn only in the 9th and early 8th centuries, was the *gulgullatu.* This was a bowl-shaped metal cap worn by the 'second man' of a cavalry team, the one who held the reins for the archer as he shot his arrows.

Shields

Shields are to be seen being carried by infantry on most of the wall reliefs of all the Neo-Assyrian kings. There are however a variety of shields being utilized throughout the three centuries of the army's existence. Eight types of shield have been identified, of which four are circular. The remainder were rectangular in design. The French Assyriologist Fabrice de Backer has written a handbook that goes into detail of many aspects of the shields used by the Assyrian Army. We will draw on his work and classification of types in the compilation of this short segment on the Assyrian shield. In some cases the terminology used to classify a shield type derives from a non-Assyrian source, as in the case of his employment of the Roman term *scutum* to describe a very similar Assyrian type.

Of the round shield types, at least three of the four identified have body constructed from wickerwork. As these three types constituted the mass of such devices employed by the auxiliary and regular infantry, they must have been made in their very many thousands to equip the large number of these troops. It is unsurprising therefore that Assyrian farmers were required when possible to grow large quantities of reeds, for which large spaces on the land were reserved. When dried, they were woven and utilized in the manufacture of shields.

De Backer identifies these as the *rondache,* the *herrisson* and the *aspis*. The wicker frame could then be overlain with leather and strips of thin wood. In the case of the last of these named shields, the *aspis*, de Backer states that it was made in a 'spherical form, pointed at the summit and reinforced by layers of leather or cloth'. A variation of these techniques would be employed to a greater or lesser degree for the other types. The last of the round types described by de Backer is the *targe*, which he describes as follows. It was 'a flat, round shield equipped with one handle. Its size could range from small to medium. It was often equipped with a metallic umbo, flat or rounded and hollow, in order to hold the handle of the shield. It is thought to have been covered with layers of leather and cloth.'

Reeds were also employed extensively in the construction of rectangular shields, of which de Backer identifies four types; the *turreos*, *scutum*, *gerrhon* and *pavois*. The *turreos*-type shield is seen extensively on the wall reliefs, especially in those dating to Sargon II, being carried by auxiliary troops and can be recognized by the employment of what looks like brickwork – actually the slats of wood.

The Assyrian *scutum* is hypothesized as having a base of wicker upon which slats of wood were added; afterwards they would have been submerged in boiling water to make the whole structure pliable and amenable to bending

in a mould or 'tied around a tree to dry'. Analysis of Roman *scutum* shields and their method of construction provides insight into how Assyrian shields of this type may have been constructed. The front of the shield is thought to have been covered with leather or cloth. Unlike the Roman *scutum*, the top of the Assyrian shield was curved. A good image of this type of shield can be seen on the Til-Tuba reliefs in this book. Given that they took longer to construct and are larger than most circular shields, it is likely they were issued to the heavy infantry of the *kisir sharruti.*

The *gerrhon* was constructed of layers of slats of wood in order to provide cover for three men in profile. This type of shield, as with the *pavois*, was most effective, as being high and wide enough for archers engaged in siege work to shoot from behind. The *pavois*, although made from wicker, could be made much larger and had the benefit of still being fairly light. It is suggested that such a device was employed by Assyrian soldiers advancing up the siege ramp at Lachish providing shelter to those bringing up the stones that were employed to build it.

Other shields of a circular design but constructed of bronze have been found, and there is a particular example in the British Museum recovered by Layard. Although having been compressed by the earth lying on top of it, its essential shape can still be seen. Extremely large bronze shields were employed in limited numbers, probably by bodyguard troops. Although de Backer doubts that they were ever as large as depicted in our plate of palace guards equipped with them (see p. 179), perusal of wall reliefs showing Assyrian troops in Babylonia does show some troops employing them.

It is unfortunate that only a very few of the many hundreds of thousands of shields that must have been constructed over the centuries have survived, but like all other items constructed from organic materials they have rotted in the ground. For anyone who wishes to learn more about Assyrian shields Fabrice de Backer's book is well worth a read. It is listed in the bibliography.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE ASSYRIAN ARMY AT WAR

It is difficult to give a detailed treatment for more than just a few of the many operations that the Assyrian Army conducted over the three centuries of its existence because of the manner in which they are described in the Annals of the respective kings. These operations are not presented in detail, but rather in generalized terms that make it difficult to portray the progression of the battle/campaign, or the tactics employed, with any certainty.

The few sources that provide the type of information that permits a more detailed reconstruction of military operations fall within the category of 'the letter to the god'. This is an account of the campaign just fought presented by the king to the god Ashur in his temple, either in the capital city or in Ashur. The letter was addressed to Ashur and the other gods, as well as the priesthood and the people of the city, and was read out in public. Its purpose was to inform the deity of the conduct of the campaign, the main events, and to draw particular attention to the prowess of the king and his troops in the difficult conditions they encountered in the hostile terrain of Urartu. There was a powerful propagandistic element in

OPPOSITE

The means by which the huge number of stones for a siege ramp was transported from the quarried hillside to the rear of the ramp to the ramp itself was by human labour. Lines of impressed workers moved tons of stone on a daily basis to build the ramp upward. Note the use of wicker baskets to transport the loads.
(© The Trustees of the British Museum)

the letter, as it was meant to convey to the people the efficacy of both their king and his army. Sargon II's campaign against Urartu in 714 BC is one of the most detailed accounts given in this way, and it is often referenced for that reason.

THE CAMPAIGN: SARGON II AND THE INVASION OF URARTU

Sargon's II's decision to invade Urartu in 714 BC was most likely prompted by an opportunistic desire to exploit that kingdom's disastrous defeat at the hands of the Cimmerians. Although Sargon had campaigned in territories to the south of Urartu in 719, 716 and 715 BC, he had never before attacked the country itself. However, given how problematic this northern power was to his empire, he could hardly fail to take advantage of the opportunity to deal it a major blow when circumstances permitted him to do so. By the beginning of 714 BC, Neo-Assyrian operatives and others had provided a number of reports to Crown Prince Sennacherib in Nineveh. He acted as the conduit to pass on to the king the invaluable intelligence of the costly defeat experienced by the Urartian King Rusa I at the hands of the Cimmerians, which had led to a substantial diminishment of the power of the Urartian Army. The implication of these reports was that Urartu was temporarily weakened and that an Assyrian attack on the kingdom would be difficult to resist.

The operation began somewhat later in the year than normal, in the summer month of Dumuzi (late June or early July). This late departure is an indication of the level of planning involved, as passage into Urartu proper was via passes through the mountains that would not be fully clear of snow until then. In addition, the army would be operating beyond friendly territory where the provision of rations could be depended upon as vassals were obliged to provide them, and would need to live off the enemy's land. The arrival of the Assyrian Army in Urartu in early autumn would then coincide with the harvest having been brought in and the grain stored. Furthermore, grass would be available in abundance for grazing the cavalry mounts, while the numerous livestock in the fields would provide 'meat on the hoof' for the soldiers.

The Campaign Begins

Having assembled one part of the army in Nimrud, Sargon led it southwards, crossing the Upper and Lower Zab before climbing up into: 'the passes of Mount Kullar, a high mountain range of the land of the Lullumi – which

they also called Zamua, I entered. In the Sumbi district I held a review of my army; I made a count of the horses and chariots. With the strong support of Ashur, Shamash, Nabu and Marduk, for the third time I directed the line of march into the mountains.'

NIMRUD LETTER 89 – THE ASSYRIAN ARMY IN ZAMUA

This cuneiform letter from the governor of Mat-Zamua to Sargon II sometime during the course of his reign details the strength of the forces under his command. It refers to *kallapu* – a term of some controversy among Assyriologists, although understood here to refer to infantry/ foot soldiers. It gives an insight into the deployment of troops among the many military centres of the empire. This may well have been sent in 714 BC just before the Urartu campaign.

To the king my lord, your servant Ashur-issiya, may it be well with the king my lord.
With regard to the king's instruction to me, that I should review the forces of Mat-Zamua and communicate [the results] to him:
Ten chariots, two wagons. Ten [teams] of horses, ten [teams] of mules, total 20 teams.
Ninety-seven cavalry horses.
Eleven chariot-drivers, 12 'third riders', ten nobles, 53 grooms.
[20] team commanders: total 106 chariot troops.
161 cavalry men, 130 grooms, 52 *zunzurahu,* total 343 grooms.
Eight lackeys, 12 tailors, 20 butlers, 12 victuallers, seven bakers, ten cooks: total 69 domestic servants.
Eight scribes.
Twenty-three donkey drivers.
One reporter.
Eighty *kallapu.*
Total 630 Assyrians.
360 Gurraeans, 440 Itu'aeans.
Grand total 1,430 'king's troops', including the previous ones who were here and those the aide-de-camp brought me.
In case the king my lord wonders where the rest of the forces are, my major-domo is delayed and he is bringing the rest of the forces.

What Sargon called Zamua was centred on the Sharizor Plain and is today identified with the province of Sulaymaniyah in the Kurdish Autonomous Region of Iraq. It was here that many elements of the army were ordered to muster prior to their advance into the Zagros Mountains, and to do so in a short period of time in order not to tax the resources of the province in the feeding of a large number of troops and horses. Bearing in mind the particular difficulties that his army would encounter in terms of the rough terrain to be traversed, the higher altitude it would be operating in and the limited supplies that could be carried, it is likely that it was not a large expedition, and it may have numbered at the most some 30,000 men.

Having reviewed his army, Sargon then moved off into the Zagros Mountains 'for the third time' – the reference is to the earlier campaigns he had led against those Mannaean kingdoms that had become the object of the hostilities between Assyria and Urartu. It was against two of these, namely the lands of Zikurtu and Andia, that Sargon directed his line of march and 'guided the chariot of Nergal and Adad whose emblems go before me'.

Once into the mountains, the temperatures became cooler, but the terrain the expedition was traversing became extremely problematic, with Sargon telling us: 'Between Mount Nikippa and Mount Upa, high mountains covered with all kinds of trees, whose surface was a jungle, whose passes were frightful, over whose area shadows stretch as in a cedar forest, the traveler of whose paths never sees the light of the sun, I marched.'

The king related how the army had to cross one particular river, the Buia, which was swollen with the snowmelt, on no fewer than 26 occasions. Attempting to surmount Mount Simirria, 'a large mountain peak, which stands out like the blade of a lance', the difficulties for the army increased substantially, particularly as the track, on whose sides 'gorges and precipices yawn', was too rough for chariots and horses to traverse and too steep for foot soldiers. However Sargon ordered his soldiers to break out the: 'mighty bronze pickaxes in my equipment and they shattered the sides of the high mountain … making a good road. I kept at the head of my army and made my chariots, cavalry and infantry fly over that peak… I had labourers and sappers follow behind them. The camels and asses scrambled to the summit like wild goats. I brought the dense masses of Ashur's hosts up to the steep ascent in safety, and set my camp in order at the top of that mountain'.

The appearance of the Assyrian Army generated much trepidation, as Sargon himself commented when he observed that the: 'governors of the lands of Namri, Sagubuti, Bit-Abdadani, and of the land of the powerful Medes, heard of my approach of my expedition, my devastation of their lands in a former year was still in their minds and terror fell upon them. Their heavy tribute they brought out of their lands and submitted to me in Parsua'.

In addition, other rulers included Ullusunu of Wishdish, Bel-apla-iddina of Allabria, Dalta of Ellipi and the rulers of the Median territories.

We have here a specific reference to the consequences of Sargon's policy in the 715 BC campaign in Mannaea, wherein he stated that he had 'left behind me a terror never to be forgotten'. One year later, it was in fear of a repetition of this that Sargon received a willing delivery of tribute from a large number of governors and rulers in the region, comprising mainly of 'draft horses without number, cattle and sheep'. There were also a large number of camels which were probably impressed into the army's baggage train. That the Assyrian Army did not find itself engaged in conflict at this stage of the campaign suggests that it was of sufficiently large a size to intimidate any possible opposition.

Thereafter the Assyrian Army continued its advance and entered the territory of Gizilbanda, whose king submitted to Sargon. From here the army moved forward to Zikurtu and Andia and thereafter to Wishdish.

War breaks out between Assyria and Urartu

It was while he was in Wishdish that Sargon received a formal challenge to battle from Rusa, king of Urartu. Such would have been in keeping with the conventions of the time, wherein a challenge to battle would be accompanied by details of the time and place the two respective armies would meet.

In his letter to Ashur, Sargon was punctilious in asserting that he was not the instigator of this war because: 'he had never yet come near Rusa the Urartian, and the border of his wide-land, nor poured out the blood of his warriors on the battlefield', and as right was on his side: 'I lifted my hands, praying that I might bring about his defeat in battle'. This was a thoroughly self-serving piece of propaganda inasmuch as the intention of this military operation was, as we have seen, just such an invasion of Urartu.

The two sides met at the battle of Waus, fought (it is thought) in a ravine near Mount Sahend, east of Lake Urmia; the battle is covered in more detail below. Following the Assyrian victory, with the bulk of the Urartian Army destroyed and many of its leaders in Sargon's hands, the way was now open for an invasion of the country. Sargon's intention was not to occupy the country but to inflict punitive damage on the Urartian state so that it would no longer be able to interfere with Assyrian ambitions in Mannaea. The essence of the campaign that Sargon now embarked upon was economic. His army would advance, bringing fire and destruction in its wake, and destroy many of the agricultural resources that the Urartian Army depended upon to conduct its wars. Crown Prince Sennacherib, at home in Nimrud, would apply the same strategy some years later against the state of Judah in the southern Levant in

701 BC. The Assyrian Army could also not advance any great distance into Urartu as it was now late summer and any operation would need to be completed before the onset of winter conditions. Otherwise, the passes on the return to Assyria would be blocked by heavy snow.

Despite the detailed description of the campaign of destruction waged by Sargon's army and the exhaustive list of 'cities' destroyed noted in the 'Letter to the god', Sargon's campaign had to be a speedy one for the reasons given above and his army would have had only one or two days at most to deal with any individual city. Nor did he wish to find his army confronted by a strong enemy prepared to offer armed resistance. This seems never to have occurred, as those in the villages and towns could see the columns of dust and smoke that denoted the trail of destruction as they advanced in their direction. As fear mounted, the settlements were largely abandoned as their inhabitants either fled to the hills or deeper into the countryside.

The exact route followed by Sargon's army has been the subject of much scholarly debate. The constraints of time, coupled with his intention to visit the maximum degree of destruction on Urartu in the limited time available, make it unlikely that the Assyrian Army traversed the whole of Lake Urmia. There were, it would seem, few settlements to be found there and the economic damage that could be inflicted greatly less than could be realized if the route taken was to the south-west of it. There were far more settlements there and the potential to inflict damage thus far greater. Furthermore, by staying to the south of Lake Urmia the army was operating in territory which made a return to Assyria much easier. Whatever route was followed, the Assyrian Army ravaged the countryside. The fate of the Urartian fortress city of Ushkaia is one example among many: 'the mainstay of his land, together with the cities around about, they turned into ruins… with the advance of my mighty arms, I went up against that fortress, carried off its overflowing wealth, and brought it into my camp. Its great wall… I destroyed completely, I brought it to the ground. The dwellings within it I set on fire. 115 cities of the neighbourhood I burned like brush and covered the face of heaven with their smoke.'

Whenever they came to cities with storehouses: 'their filled-up granaries I opened up and let my army devour the unmeasured grain. Like swarming locusts I turned the beasts of my camps into its meadows and they tore up the vegetation on which the city depended, they devastated its plain.'

Even as this tide of destruction continued to wash over Urartu, thought was given to assembling the resources for the return march: 'The great heaps of barley and wheat which during the many days they had heaped up in their granaries for the support of land and people, I had my whole army load on horses, mules camels and asses. Food in plenty and to satiety, I let my people eat. Ample provision of supplies for the return to Assyria they made in gladness.'

Orchards were cut down, as were trees in the forests, and then burnt. The litany of destruction goes on and on, with Sargon listing in his 'Letter to the god' that his army destroyed some 430 farmsteads, villages, towns and cities in seven provinces of Urartu. There is no question that the impact on Urartu was profound and its capacity to oppose Assyria in the future was severely impacted by this destruction. It also made it difficult for it to resist the growing pressure from the Cimmerians to the north.

Return Journey and the Sack of Musasir

When finally Sargon issued the word to return to Assyria, he decided to take 1,000 volunteers from his army to punish Urzana of Musasir en route to the homeland. This ruler had shown disrespect to Sargon by withholding 'his tribute, tax and gifts and not once did he send his messenger to greet me'. Having ordered the bulk of his army, weighed down with booty, to return to Assyria, Sargon in his single battle chariot led 1,000 horsemen – in all probability those of his mounted personal guard under his brother Sin-ahu-usur – down the road to Musasir. There was more to Musasir than it simply being the home of the ruler, as it was the location of the temple of the chief god of Urartu, Haldia. The temple of this god was replete with many years of offerings and it represented a vast treasure that Sargon intended to loot and take back to Assyria.

His force arrived at the city gate completely unexpectedly and the city was in no position to keep the Assyrian expedition out. The Assyrian monarch had decided to deport the whole population, and as a symbol of its fall the statue of Haldia was 'godnapped'. Urzana was made to 'sit before his city gate' and 'his wife, his sons, his daughters, his people, the seed of his father's house, I carried off.'

Sargon ensconced himself in the royal palace as the contents of the great temple of the god were inventoried and loaded up onto wagons. In his 'Letter to the god' Sargon lists the excessive bounty of the temple, with the sheer value of its content amounting to one of the greatest booties ever secured by an Assyrian king. In the original text the listing of this haul amounts to 50 lines of cuneiform, which, when translated into English in the 'Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia' by D.D. Luckenbill (used extensively in this work), amounts to some two and a half pages of text. Sargon described it as 'great wealth without calculation'.

Sargon's decision to attempt this very bold operation was also designed to serve as a great propaganda coup. What better way to signal the impotence of Rusa to defend his kingdom than that the king of Assyria could sack and ransack the shrine of the national god? In the latter part of the 'Letter', Sargon

had his scribes set down the reaction of the Urartian king upon hearing of the sacking of Musasir, albeit, it must be said, employing a fair degree of literary licence: 'Rusa heard and sank down to the ground, he rent his garments and bared his limbs, he pulled off his headband, tore his hair, beat upon his breast with his two hands, threw himself on his back; his heart stood still, his body burned and in his mouth were cries of pain. Over Urartu, to its farthest border, I spread mourning, and cast eternal mourning over Nairi.'

There is no question that the 714 BC campaign against Urartu was the military highpoint of Sargon's reign. He had shown himself to be an inspired and inspiring commander of the Assyrian Army, and the military force that he led was an instrument of great effectiveness.

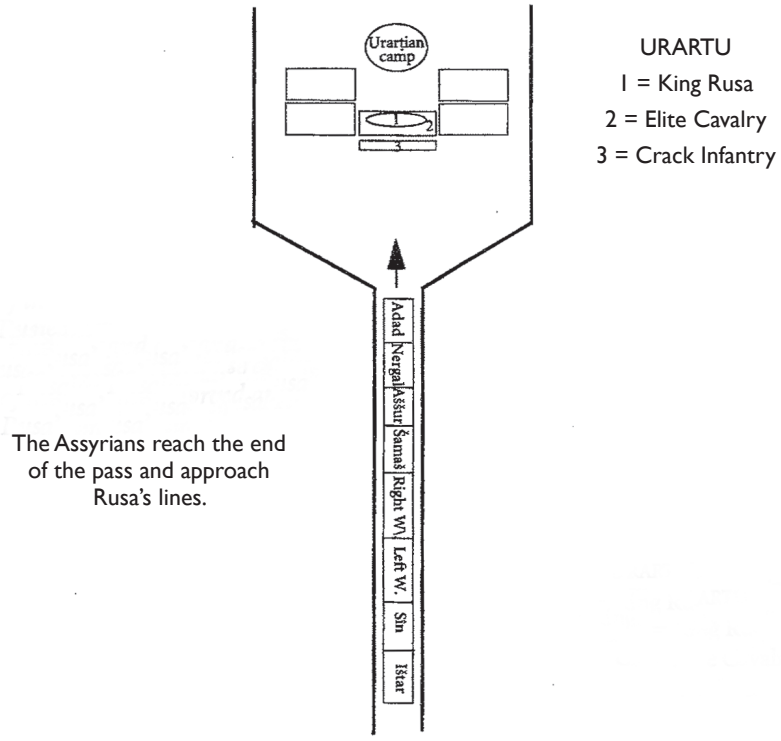
OPEN FIELD BATTLES

Mount Waus, 714 BC

Mount Waus is one of the few Assyrian battles that can be reconstructed in some detail by virtue of it being part of King Sargon II's 'Letter to the god'. The account of the battle is heroic in tone and bears a great similarity to the description of another of Sargon's battles, Dur-Yakin fought in 709 BC in Babylonia. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that the battle in 714 BC preceded that of Dur-Yakin by some five years, and it could be that the latter drew on the account of the former clash of arms. Nonetheless, even bearing in mind these possible correctives, we will proceed on the basis that the account in the 'Letter to the god' is, within the limitations of its literary form, sufficient to allow us to create a reasonably accurate account of what transpired.

The battle that took place was a consequence of a challenge issued by the Urartian king Rusa to Sargon to meet him in battle at Mount Waus. This actual site is still much debated but it has been suggested that this may correspond to the site near the modern Mount Sahend, which lies in north-west Iran. Rusa was deploying an army which was still recovering from the extensive drubbing it had experienced at the hands of the Cimmerians. It is possible that many of his better troops were not present as they had either been lost or were still in the vassal state of Guriania. Rusa, having got wind of Assyrian intentions, wanted to meet Sargon in battle to forestall the Assyrian Army entering Urartu and ravaging the country before the onset of winter.

The Urartian king drew up his army in a battle line across a ravine in order to prevent the Assyrian cavalry from turning his flanks. This deployment must have taken place on a specific day. Along with his own troops, he also deployed the forces of the allied kingdoms of Andia, Wishdish, Zikurtu and others. Rusa's arrangement of his battle line saw him take the centre amid his elite



cavalry. To their fore were his heavy infantry. His allied troops, both infantry and cavalry, were located on the respective wings.

We do not know at what time of the day the battle was fought, or for how long the Urartian force had been drawn up awaiting the enemy's arrival, but the seeming rapidity with which the Urartian Army disintegrated once attacked suggests that they were not expecting the Assyrian forces to operate in the way that they did. It seems a reasonable hypothesis that Rusa expected the Assyrian Army to deploy in front of him before joining battle. Indeed, if he knew, or suspected that the army was, as Sargon tells us: 'exhausted, having crossed innumerable mighty mountains whose ascent and descent were most difficult … I could not relieve their fatigue, nor give them water to quench their thirst', then it could be that he was expecting them to do so, and that he was possibly hoping to do to Sargon what the Assyrian king did to him – that is, attack when his enemy was not ready.

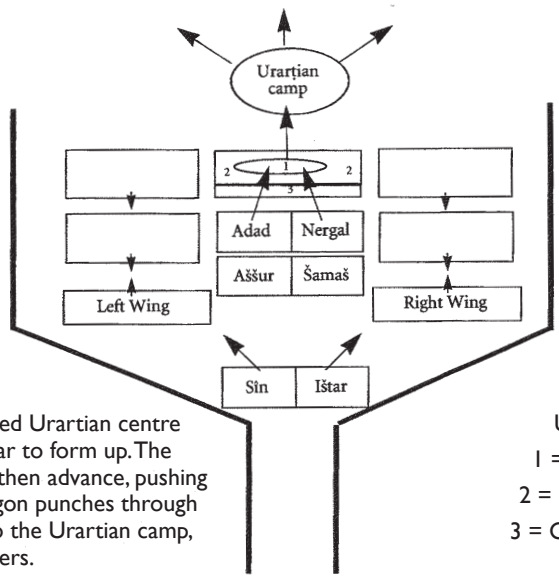
Sargon approached at the head of his army in his: 'single chariot, together with my cavalry who never leave my side, nor in enemy, nor in friendly country, the regiment of Sin-ahu-usur' and came upon the enemy deployment. With the rest of his army following in column to his rear, a formation necessarily employed by virtue of the narrowness of the defile, it may be that Sargon made the decision to attack the Urartian line straight away, perhaps

sensing that such a tactic would totally wrong-foot the enemy. However, it is unlikely that such a decision would have been made by Sargon upon seeing the enemy line for the first time. If he wished to take advantage of surprise, then he must have known before he hove into sight of the Urartian deployment what he intended to do. He may well have sent ahead a number of scouts who, having observed Rusa's dispositions, rode or scurried back at speed to inform the king. Only then could Sargon have decided what tactic to adopt and have communicated such to his brother, Sin-ahu-usur. He in turn would have ordered the 1,000-man cavalry escort to deploy to assail the enemy in a direct frontal assault.

It is likely that in the approach to the Urartian position the lead units were composed of the archers and spearmen of auxiliary light infantry, the Itu'aeans and Gurraeans, who dispersed to either flank of the Assyrian column as they closed with the Urartian force in order to screen the cavalry and prevent the Urartians from realizing what was happening. If this did take place it says much for the discipline and organization of the Assyrian forces. No doubt an attack in column was a manoeuvre that the cavalry had been prepared for in training and could be employed on word from the commander.

Sargon now launched the attack that undid the Urartian deployment. The Assyrian bodyguard and other cavalry charged, with Sargon in his chariot leading in the van. It is likely that the Assyrian cavalry with the king in his chariot charged the Urartians in column and on a narrow frontage in order to maximize the impact on the enemy line. In all probability, the cavalry was drawn up with a column just 20 riders wide with the rest of the mounted troops, totalling some 200 deep, arraigned behind them. The shock that his charge imparted to the surprised Urartian ranks was substantial, resulting in their virtual disintegration. Having begun the charge, Sargon tells the god: 'I plunged into his midst like a swift javelin, I defeated him, I turned back his advance; I killed large numbers of his troops, the bodies of his warriors I cut down like millet… His warriors the mainstay of his army, bearers of bow and lance, I slaughtered about his feet like lambs… His noblemen, counsellors who stand before him, I shattered their arms in battle, them and their horses I captured.'

Whilst no doubt more than a few of the leading Assyrian cavalrymen were lost, the sheer momentum of those following behind at the gallop would have been enough to carry them through the Urartian front line, with the screen of elite infantry being overridden before the Assyrians then plunged into the elite cavalry drawn up behind them. Among these was stationed the Urartian king, who fell back on his camp in hope of making a stand there in the face of this ferocious assault. But the disintegration of his troops was already too far gone to do so, with Sargon claiming to have targeted the king's chariot and: 'destroyed his chariot horses under him with arrows'.



Sargon attacks the weakened Urartian centre without waiting for his rear to form up. The strengthened Urartian wings then advance, pushing back the Assyrian wings. Sargon punches through the centre, driving Rusa into the Urartian camp, which scatters.

URARTU
1 = King Rusa
2 = Elite Cavalry
3 = Crack Infantry

In consequence of which Rusa, in order to save his life: 'abandoned his chariot, mounted on a mare'. As with the recounting of the escape of the Urartian king in battle with Tiglath-pileser III at Kummuh, the Assyrians insulted and impugned their opponents' bravery by claiming they rode 'mares', which Assyrian soldiers did not employ in battle. They rode only stallions. To ride a mare was deemed by them to be 'effeminate'.

The impression gained is that the Assyrian attack had so completely wrong-footed the Urartian force that it crumpled in the face of the ferocious assault. The Urartian and allied forces stationed on the wings were unable to come to the aid of the king in the centre of the line.

For even as the Assyrian cavalry began their assault, other troops, primarily the heavy infantry, were following up and deploying to face and attack the enemy on the left and right wings of their deployment, who were thus pinned down. The Assyrian infantry were also probably drawn up in column and in a formation that would have looked like a 'phalanx'. It was these forces deployed on both wings of the Assyrian advance that seem to have accomplished the defeat of the forces of the tributary kingdoms allied to Urartu: 'Metatti of Zirkurtu, together with the kings of his environment – I cut down their army and broke up their organization'.

The disintegration of the Urartian centre precipitated that of the wings, and very soon the whole army, both mounted and on foot, was retreating in disorder, being chased by the victorious Assyrians. Sargon describes this conclusion to the battle as follows:

> I defeated the armies of Urartu, the wicked enemy, and their allies, in the midst of Uaush Mountain he came to a stop. I filled the gullies and gorges with their horses while they, like ants in distress, made their way over the most difficult trails. In the heat of my terrible weapons I went after them, filling the ascents and descents with the corpses of their warriors. Over 6 *beru* ['double hours' – with each beru corresponding to approx. a league of distance] of ground from Mount Uaush to Mount Zimur, the jasper mountain, I pursued them at the point of a lance.

This victory had opened up Urartu to invasion by Sargon's army, and his defeat led to Rusa's suicide.

The Battle of Halule, 691 BC

The battle of Halule was unquestionably one of the more ferocious open field battles fought by the Neo-Assyrian Army, a victory that Sennacherib was immensely proud of. His account of it was already being committed to clay by a court scribe within months of it having been fought and even before the end of his eighth campaign.

The prism on which the account of the battle is to be found now resides in the United States at Chicago University, where it is now known as 'The Taylor Prism'. We are fortunate in being given a date for the battle on it: the twentieth day in the month of Addaru (March) 691 BC. That it happened early in that year and before the normal beginning of the campaigning season in May is perhaps testimony to the seriousness with which Sennacherib viewed the events that preceded it. Sennacherib had not raised his large army just to fight a battle but to lead a major campaign into Babylonia to defeat its king Shuzubu (also known as Mushezib-Marduk) and re-establish Assyrian dominance over the region. That he had to fight such a hard battle at Halule was a necessity rather than an objective, as the enemy's deployment had blocked the Assyrian advance into the southern kingdom. While it is one of the more substantive accounts of a battle fought by the Assyrians and contains more than the usual amount of detail, it is nonetheless still couched in the same hyperbolic and propagandistic language and style in which most Assyrian reports of these events were expressed. As is the norm, the king lies at the heart of the account and his singular performance on the battlefield is described in truly heroic terms. Nonetheless, it has been the focus of detailed analysis by Assyriologists over the years. The conclusions about its outcome vary substantially and some commentators have expressed serious doubts about the veracity of Sennacherib's account, with the most extreme view being that it is simply a prodigious falsehood. Others have seen in it a

relatively accurate account of how the battle unfolded, although couched in very broad brushstrokes.

The Helsinki Atlas of the Near East in the Neo-Assyrian Period locates Halule very near to the city of Surmarrati (and near the present site of the city of Samarra), which lay on the eastern bank of the Tigris, with Halule some kilometres to the south and on the western bank of the river. This puts the battle site approximately 180km (110 miles) to the south of Ashur and some 130km (80 miles) north of the modern capital of Baghdad. It was on the western bank of the Tigris that the main road into Babylonia ran south, alongside the river, stretching from the north and bypassing the main Assyrian cities of Nineveh, Kalhu and Ashur. All three of these could have functioned as muster points for the army that Sennacherib called up and which then proceeded to march south towards Babylonia. Given also the relative proximity of the province of Zamua, it is very likely that forces from its main city would have also been summoned to join the main army in its procession south under the command of its governor.

Assyrian scouts and intelligence provided by sources within the southern kingdom would have relayed to Sennacherib in advance what was unfolding in Babylon and what military forces were being amassed to confront the Assyrian Army. It was not just the Babylonians in the form of the forces of the Chaldaean, Aramaean and Arab tribes of Bit-Adini, Bit-Amukkani, Bit-Shilani, Gambulu and Puqudu led by the Chaldaean king of Babylon, Shuzubu, who would oppose the Assyrian monarch, but also a large force provided by Elam and its allies and vassals. Despite the internecine struggles that periodically afflicted that kingdom, as competitors to the throne vied with one another in bloody assassinations and civil wars, when matters within Elam were relatively quiescent their kings were more than happy to lend their quite substantial and effective military forces to aid the Babylonians/Chaldaeans against the Assyrians – especially when the request for their support was encouraged by an extensive financial bribe, as it was this time. The Elamite Army brought with it forces provided by several Iranian tribes and even from Ellipi, a city-state that was normally loyal to Assyria. This collective army was placed under the command of an Elamite general by the name of Humbanundasha.

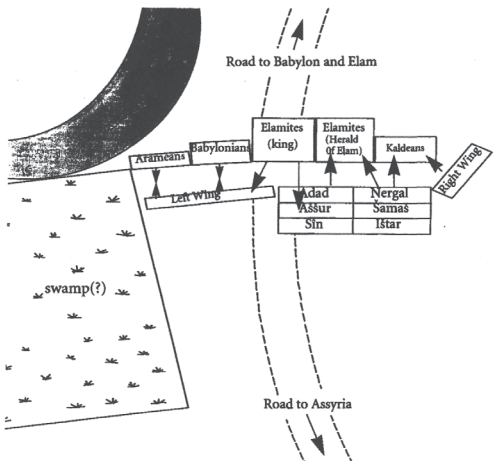
Sennacherib describes the passage of what was clearly a very large enemy force northwards in the typical florid style employed in the Annals: 'Like the onset of the locust swarms of the springtime they kept coming on against me to offer battle. With dust of their feet covering the wide heavens, like a mighty storm with its masses of dense clouds, they drew up in battle array before me by the city of Halule, on the bank of the Tigris. They blocked my passage and offered battle.'

The Babylonian/Elamite line was drawn up facing northwards across the road that led southwards to Babylon. Despite the Babylonian claim that their king was in overall command of the combined armies, it is more likely that Humbanundasha – the Elamite *turtanu* – was responsible for the deployment of the allied forces. It is interesting that Sennacherib had some regard for the Elamite *turtanu,* describing him as 'trustworthy', which does suggest that maybe he had some personal acquaintance with the man and that he was a commander of some ability. No doubt the subsequent deployment reflected Humbanundasha's perception of the respective strengths, weaknesses and even the political loyalties of the forces under his command.

Unsurprisingly, it was the Elamite units to which he allocated the most important position in the line. The Aramaean and Babylonian forces, those he deemed to be the weakest and the most likely to give in to Assyrian pressure once the battle began, he placed on his right wing, which was anchored on the bank of the river Tigris. Composed mainly of foot archers, these were likely the least heavily armed of his troops. It is also doubtful that they were supported by cavalry, given the constrained terrain to be found there. The Elamite forces, together with the respective kings, Umman-menanu of Elam and Shuzubu of Babylon, were deployed in their chariots along with those of their nobility behind a screen of Elamite infantry, whilst on the left wing were deployed the soldiery of the numerous Chaldaean tribes, the bulk of which were archers operating on foot. No doubt there were also supporting cavalry and chariotry, both Elamite and Chaldaean.

Sennacherib tells us that he prayed to 'Ashur, Sin, Shamash, Bel, Nabu, Nergal, Ishtar of Nineveh, Ishtar of Arbela, the gods in whom I trust, I prayed for victory over the mighty foe'. Then, unusually, because no Assyrian monarch

The Battle of Ḫalule I



was ever depicted on any of the wall reliefs dressed in such apparel, the norm being to see him dressed in what could be called a ceremonial gown, Sennacherib continued: 'I put on my coat of mail. My helmet, emblem of victory. My helmet I placed on my head. My great battle chariot, which brings low the foe, I hurriedly mounted in the anger of my heart. The mighty bow which Ashur had given me, I seized in my hands; the javelin, piercing to life, I grasped'.

We are then presented with an idealized image of Sennacherib as no doubt he would have liked to be seen. He is described as plunging alone into the enemy host and single-handedly demolishing their line, killing and maiming at every turn. The Assyrian king is depicted as the great super-warrior, protected by the gods. This is propaganda, a paean to the image of the king of Assyria as the paragon of warriors. It is unlikely that this is the way matters actually transpired. The reality was that Sennacherib in all probability did not take part in the battle and was a passive observer surrounded by his cavalry bodyguard. The advice offered by a high-ranking courtier to his son Esarhaddon is a more accurate reflection of Sennacherib's situation: 'Of course, the king my lord should not go to the midst of battle! Just as the kings, your ancestors have done, take position on a hill and let your magnates do the fighting!' Assyria could not afford the death in battle of another king, with all the consequences that entailed.

Far from awaiting the Assyrian advance, the forces of the coalition actually initiated combat by beginning an advance on the Assyrian line, prompting the latter also to begin their attack. Sennacherib tells us: 'With weapons of Ashur, my lord and the terrible onset of my attack, I stopped their advance'.

Although detail is lacking, it is not unreasonable to envisage both lines moving towards each other under a hail of arrows from the other side.

Sennacherib launched the centre of his own line, comprising the elite troops of the *kisur sharruti,* directly at their opposite number. It is very likely that this comprised the massed ranks of the elite Assyrian heavy infantry, drawn up shield to shield 'phalanx' style, and supported by archers. As they crashed into the Elamite line, it wavered and very slowly began to buckle, giving ground as it was pushed back, although extracting a high price from the Assyrian infantry even as it did so. It may be that this confrontation rapidly turned into a very bloody melee. In the colourful language of the account in the Annals the king declares: 'I decimated the enemy host with arrow and spear. All of their bodies I bored through like a sieve.'

While the Assyrians assailed the enemy centre, on their right wing additional heavy infantry also advanced and crashed into the Chaldaean troops stationed there. As they were being pinned down, Assyrian heavy cavalry swept around their flank, rolling up the left wing of their line and plunging into their rear. If there was indeed some battle plan being enacted by the Assyrians,

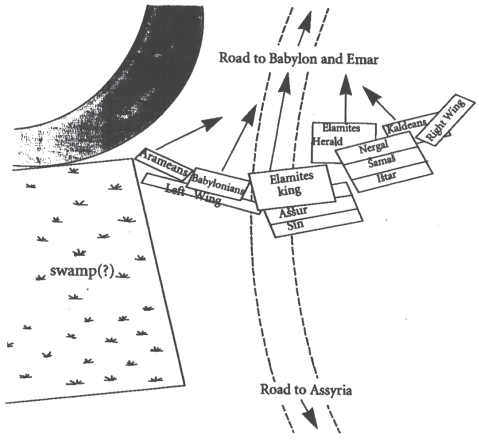
it may well have been that the intention was to have pushed the enemy left back onto the river.

Despite the lack of chariotry depicted on the wall reliefs dating from Sennacherib's reign, there are more than a few references to chariots in the account of Halule, and they are not all belonging to the enemy: 'The chariots and their horses, whose riders had been slain at the beginning of the terrible onslaught and had gone over to their side, these my hands seized in the midst of the battle. The chariots and their horses, whose riders had been slain at the beginning of the terrible onslaught, and who had been left to themselves, kept running back and forth'.

On the left of the Assyrian line, and the right of that of the coalition, it would seem the Assyrian pressure brought about an early collapse of the Aramaean and Babylonian forces. It was also here that some of the nobility was stationed and captured. Sennacherib tells us: 'The rest of his [the king of Babylon's] nobles (together with Nabu-shum-ishkun, the son of Merodach-baladan), who had taken fright before my onslaught and gone over to their side, these my hands seized in the midst of battle'.

Although the coalition line was wavering and buckling along its length in the face of the ferocious Assyrian assault, it would seem there was no collapse. There can also be no doubt that the Assyrians were experiencing heavy losses even as they were successful in pushing back on the enemy line. Even so, the Elamite king Umman-menanu and the king of Babylon, seeing how matters were progressing, began surreptitiously to retreat. Whilst Sennacherib tells us 'the terror of my battle overpowered them', it would seem that they succeeded in making good their escape from the battlefield. The two kings and their retinues 'abandoned their tents and to save their lives they trampled the bodies

The Battle of Ḫalule II



of their fallen soldiers'. It is also claimed that they both voided their bowels and bladders out of fear!

Seeing them retreat, Sennacherib ordered: 'In pursuit of them I despatched my chariots and horses after them. Those among them who had escaped, who had fled for their lives, wherever they [my charioteers] met them, they cut down with sword'.

No matter how Sennacherib tried to disguise the escape of the two leaders of the coalition back to Elam and Babylon, the reality was that they got away along with some of their forces. Halule might have been trumpeted by the Assyrian monarch as a great victory, but even the account of the battle does not bear this out. The real position is probably that expressed in 'The Babylonian Chronicle 16', which states that the battle fought at Halule led to the retreat of Sennacherib and his army back to Assyria.

Inasmuch as possession of the battlefield has always been deemed to be the measure of victory in battle even up to modern times, then Sennacherib can certainly claim such as his army was left in possession of it. But it is what they failed to do next that probably is the true measure of the outcome of the battle. The Assyrian Army did not resume its advance into Babylonia, and instead it did as the Babylonian Chronicle claimed. It retreated back to the homeland to lick its wounds, with offensive operations against the southern kingdom only resuming the following year. Reading between the lines, it would appear that the Assyrians defeated the Babylonian-Elamite army and its allies at Halule, but at a great cost. So great a cost that the strategic objective of the Assyrian Army for Year Nine, the invasion of Babylonia, was no longer feasible. Sennacherib therefore had little choice but to retire to Assyria and recuperate. This might also explain the rapidity with which he ensured his account of the battle was written down – to deflect any suggestion that what was declared a victory may have been construed more accurately as a strategic defeat.

The Battle of Til-Tuba/River Ulai, 653 BC

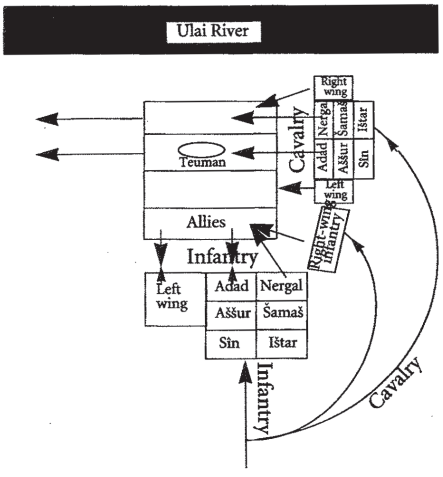
The battle of Til-Tuba is detailed on Ashurbanipal's Prism, which covers the events of his reign from the date of accession through to 649 BC. Alongside this are also the fine reliefs of the battle on display in the British Museum in London. However, our account of this battle is solely from Assyrian sources and there is no Elamite perspective. It is also in keeping with traditional Assyrian accounts of battles – long on hyperbole and very short on detail. It is therefore even more difficult to attempt a reconstruction of this battle in any objective sense than that of Halule.

In the absence of those Elamite sources, we have only the word of the Assyrian king that it was Tept-Humban – Teumman in Assyrian accounts –

who was the instigator. Ashurbanipal claims on the prism account that the Elamite Army under its king, along with several of his allies, was preparing to attack Assyria. At the time he received this news, Ashurbanipal was in the city of Erbil. As per usual, whenever any military operation was intended, the gods were first consulted. The Assyrian monarch, via his priests, petitioned the war goddess Ishtar, whose temple was in the city. The response he received was favourable. Ashurbanipal then ordered a muster of the Assyrian Army at the border fortress of Der, near to the border of Elam. This lay opposite to the Elamite city of Bit-Imbi where the Elamite Army was encamped.

However, in response to the presence of the assembling Assyrian Army, Teumman, determining that he did not want to face the enemy there but rather on ground of his own choosing, withdrew to the south-east towards his capital city at Susa. Once there, he not only reinforced his army by summoning more levies, but also reorganized it for the coming clash with the Assyrian Army, which he presumed would invade his territory. He moved his now enlarged force to the vicinity of the fortress city of Til-Tuba that was located on the banks of the river Ulai (sometimes this battle is referred to as that of Ulai, rather than Til-Tuba).

It would seem that Teumann deliberately chose to deploy his army with the river Ulai to its rear, with the observation in the Annals that the king 'made the Ulai River his fortress and seized the way to drinking water'. This supposedly denied the Assyrian Army access to a ready water supply. But by doing so Teumann was plainly offering a hostage to fortune, inasmuch as should the Elamite Army be defeated, it would have no significant avenue of retreat and would run the risk of being pushed back into the river, which is what indeed happened. The Assyrian account notes that his deployment was



unusual, in that rather than stationing the forces of his allies on either wing, as was the norm, on this occasion he deployed them to the fore of his main body of Elamite troops. This suggests that the Elamite king doubted the reliability of his allies, and by placing their forces there he ensured that they would have little choice but to fight as they would be unable to desert once battle was under way.

The Assyrians had a great deal of experience fighting the Elamites and had a degree of respect for their armies. They are often described by the Assyrians as 'numerous'. They fielded chariots and cavalry, although examples of the former illustrated on the Til-Tuba reliefs in the British Museum show them to be somewhat anachronistic – more like two-wheeled carts than the sophisticated machines fielded by the Assyrians. They did not mount a cab, so there was no means to carry a quiver of arrows. These must have lain on the floor of the

BELOW

The images of Til-Tuba are some of the most detailed wall reliefs of a battle ever constructed by Assyrian artists and sculptors. They are substantially damaged, but it is possible for the keen-eyed to see much of the detail. A number of the more significant scenes have been isolated and reproduced on a bigger scale. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

ABOVE

In this section from the Til-Tuba battle reliefs, a heavy Assyrian cavalryman is riding down an Elamite infantryman. However, his lance is on the wrong side of his horse and he cannot spear him. In the meantime, the cavalry trooper is being targeted by an Elamite archer at close range. For both armies the bow was the premier weapon and it was used for medium distance to close-range work. Surrounding the three main individuals are a mass of dead Elamites, for by this stage of the battle they have lost and are being pushed back relentlessly into the river Tuba. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

chariot, with the archer reaching down to pick one up; not an easy task once in battle. Although we know they also fielded heavier chariots, both types were drawn not by horses but mules. Horses seem to have been reserved for the cavalry, which like those of the Assyrian *kisir sharruti* were armed with both bows and spears. Even so, it would seem that the chariotry was still regarded as an elite arm, being manned primarily by the nobility. As with the Assyrian Army, the principal weapon utilized by the Elamites was the bow. Indeed, use of this weapon was almost ubiquitous, with Assyrian accounts speaking of their soldiers as 'heavily armed' and 'men of the bow and shield'.

In the meantime, the Assyrian Army had crossed the border and moved towards Til-Tuba, where scouts had located the Elamite force. Interestingly, Ashurbanipal was not present with his army, even though he naturally took credit for its victorious outcome and is described in a later re-editing of the account as being physically present. The depiction of the Assyrian Army on the Til-Tuba reliefs shows no chariots, so it must be assumed that these were left behind, with the mobile force being provided solely by the cavalry, which by this date was near the height of its effectiveness.

The Assyrian deployment was so arranged as to permit the heaviest assault to descend on the Elamite left wing. Once battle was joined, the Assyrian heavy infantry with cavalry support assailed the centre of the Elamite line, pinning them down and beginning the slow and bloody process of pushing them back. While the attack on the centre was under way and the forces there heavily engaged, massed cavalry swept out from behind the main Assyrian body and swung around to hit the Elamite force on its open left flank. Following the cavalry came a large contingent of heavy infantry. Once they crashed into the enemy, the Elamites found themselves assailed on two fronts – to the fore of their deployment and on its left flank.

As the Assyrian pressure built, the Elamite centre began to disintegrate and the rear sections began to search for a way to escape. As the massed cavalry pushed in on the left flank and was backed up by the heavy infantry, the Elamite force fell apart. It is at this point that the artists responsible for the Til-Tuba reliefs seem to have caught the action. The Assyrian troops are shown overwhelming the Elamite forces, with those at the very rear already seeking to escape by jumping into the river in a bid to get to the opposite bank. Assyrian infantry and cavalry move through the disintegrating Elamites, with the latter spearing them using their long lances thrusting downward. Both sides use their bows as close-order weapons, with one vignette showing an Elamite commander breaking his own bow before he is dispatched by an Assyrian soldier. The Til-Tuba reliefs capture the chaotic nature of the later stages of the fighting, with many of the Elamite forces unable to escape and being ground down.

ABOVE

An Assyrian soldier holds up the decapitated head of the former Elamite king Teumann. With two other soldiers sitting on the rear of a captured Elamite chariot, they are driving through the mass of dead Elamites, hell bent on reaching Nineveh as soon as possible. No doubt the Assyrian troopers hoped that bringing Ashurbanipal the head of his enemy would yield them some great reward. Of note is the almost cart-like nature of the Elamite war chariot.
(© The Trustees of the British Museum)

BELOW

In this famous scene, Ashurbanipal and his queen drink wine amidst trees and bushes in the garden outside the palace and toast the Assyrian victory at Til-Tuba. The head of the former Elamite king Teumann can be seen hanging from a palm tree on the extreme left of the image. Supposedly, Ashurbanipal both slashed the head with a knife and spat upon it before it was 'ringed' and hung to indicate his contempt for the dead king. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

The artists responsible for the reliefs were keen to show the river being choked with dead and drowning Elamite troops and mules/horses. As for the Elamite king, he had decided to get away from a battle that was clearly lost. Along with his son, Teumann mounted a chariot and attempted to escape by the only exit available to them. It would seem that the Assyrians had left the Elamite right wing unassailed to provide exactly such an escape route for those few troops who might get away. There was a small forest at this position and the king and his son plunged into the trees to make good their escape. They were, however, followed by Assyrian troops. Ashurbanipal relates what happened next: 'Teumann king of Elam… fled to save his life and hid in a wood. The crossbar [axle?] of the chariot, his royal transport, broke, and it overturned on him. Teumann in desperation said to his son "Raise the bow!"'

But before he could do so, the Assyrians were upon them. Teumann saw his son beheaded before he too succumbed to the same fate.

Thereafter the battle degenerated, with the Assyrian Army killing many of the surviving Elamites and their allies and taking others prisoner. The remnants of the Elamite Army scattered to their homeland. The defeat was not decisive, however, as another Elamite army was on campaign in Babylonia just one year later.

Another vignette in the reliefs shows an Assyrian soldier holding the Elamite king's decapitated head in his hands, mounted on a captured Elamite small chariot and urging on its driver to get back to Nineveh as soon as possible, where no doubt he expected to be rewarded by the king. Upon its receipt Ashurbanipal vented his hatred and disgust for the deceased Elamite king by both spitting upon and slashing at the face. In one of the more famous Assyrian reliefs from Ashurbanipal's reign, and reproduced on p. 293, we see it hanging from a tree in the royal garden while the king and his first wife celebrate the victory with a grand ceremonial meal and drinking wine.

THE SIEGE: LACHISH, 701 BC

Setting the Scene

Although the Assyrians conducted many sieges during the neo-Assyrian period, it is the one carried out by Sennacherib against the Judaean fortified city of Lachish in 701 BC that provides the best evidence for how they were conducted.

Lachish is a name that first cropped up for most when reading the Jewish Tanakh/ Christian Old Testament, where it is mentioned in the Second Book of Kings. But until the mid-19th century, there existed no extra-biblical evidence to confirm the historical reality of the events. Between 1847 and 1851 Austen Henry Layard recovered a series of gypsum reliefs in his excavations of Sennacherib's 'Palace without Rival' buried within the mound of Kouyunjik in the ruins of the city of Nineveh on the western side of the river Tigris opposite the city of Mosul. These were located in a small chamber, designated by the archaeologist as Room XXXVI of the Southwest Palace, with the panels originally covering its walls and arranged so that they were to be 'read' from left to right to give the viewer a detailed impression of how the siege of Lachish unfolded. Layard chose to return 12 panels to the British Museum in London, and left behind *in situ* a number which he described as showing 'large bodies of horsemen and charioteers'.

This discovery caused a great deal of excitement in London among the majority Christian population who held a primarily literal perception of

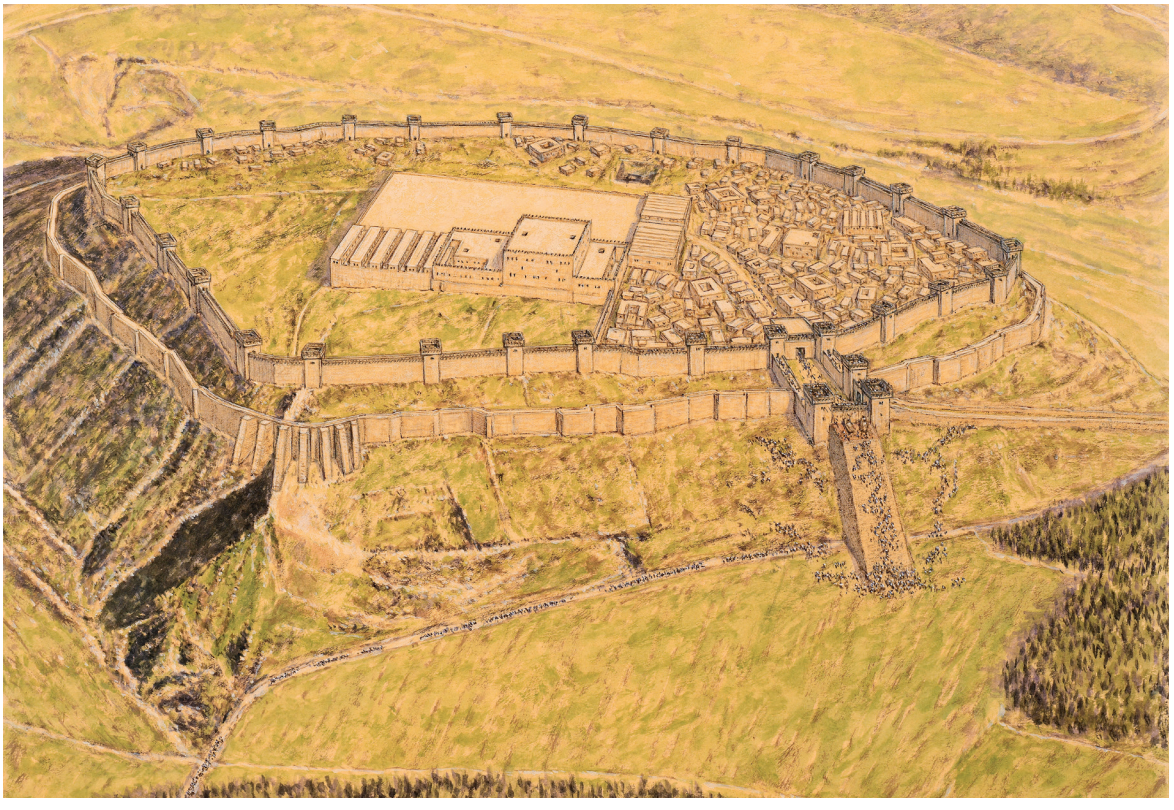
biblical material. Joseph Bonomi's best-selling book *Nineveh and its Palaces: The Discovery of Botta and Layard to the Elucidation of Holy Writ* was published in 1852. This highlights the fact that the perceived value of these discoveries at the time lay not in the importance of the reliefs themselves, but rather in the manner in which they could be employed as a validation of the literal truth of the biblical texts and of the Christian faith. More than a century and a half later, however, we have moved on from such a view. In that time, we have seen the growth and sophistication of biblical scholarship, allied to the emergence of Assyriology as an academic discipline in its own right without needing validation from Christian theology. In addition, we have the insights derived from translated cuneiform accounts of Sennacherib's campaign against Judah, even though these do not mention Lachish as it is subsumed within the fate of the 46 'walled cities' destroyed by the Assyrian Army.

Last, but very much not least, are the archaeological excavations that have been conducted at the site of Lachish itself – also known by its Arabic name of Tell ed-Duweir. The first of these was carried out in the 1930s by a British expedition under J.L. Starkey. It was he who identified Level III of the excavation as the one stormed by the Assyrians in 701 BC (Level II was assaulted by the Babylonians in 588/586 BC). Apart from a small dig at the site in the 1960s, Lachish was next addressed in a comprehensive programme of excavations beginning in 1973 carried out by the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University and the Israel Exploration Society under the direction of David Ussishkin, conducted over eight seasons of digging through to 1981. Ussishkin was involved in further excavations at Lachish up to 1994.

The latest excavations on the site were carried out by an international team led by Professor Yosef Garfinkel and Dr Madeleine Mumcuoglu of the Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and have focused on a detailed dissection and analysis of the Assyrian siege ramp – the only one to survive from the period – the details of which were published in the *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* in October 2021. Collectively, these sources permit a detailed and accurate portrayal of the siege and destruction of Lachish.

Lachish Described

Archaeological excavations at the site of the fortress city have revealed that Lachish has a provenance going back to at least the Chalcolithic period – that is, the Copper Age. The attraction of the site to those who settled it from the later 3rd millennium and the Early Bronze Age through to the period of the Assyrian conquest was always the same.



OPPOSITE TOP

An aerial photo of Tell-el-Duweir, the biblical Lachish that was laid siege to by Sennacherib in his 701 BC campaign against the kingdom of Judah. The main gate entrance can be seen to the south-east of the site. The actual Assyrian siege mound was slightly farther around from the approach road to the main entrance. (Todd Bolen/BiblePlaces.com)

OPPOSITE BOTTOM

An artist's reconstruction of Lachish as it appeared in 701 BC, viewed more or less from the same perspective as the previous aerial shot. The attack on the city has begun with the secondary assault on the city gate. This was to draw defenders away from the site of the main assault, which is farther around on the right of the city wall. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)

The Tell of Lachish stood proud of the surrounding countryside and was endowed with its own water supply, found in the north-eastern corner of the city. For the kingdom of Judah, its establishment as a formidable fortress city stemmed also from its position. It was the main defensive position in the Shephelah – the lower-lying and fertile agricultural region of the Judaean state – and astride the approach route to the capital Jerusalem, to the north-east. By the time of the Assyrian invasion, Lachish was the second most important city of the kingdom after its capital, with its primary task being the defence of the kingdom on its southern approaches. The city was protected on virtually every side by deep valleys and provided a superb defensive site.

Lachish as it would have been seen by the Assyrians was formidably defended by an outer revetment wall and then, within, a thick main city wall punctuated by towers spaced at regular intervals. These towers were surmounted by crenellations and balconies, which projected beyond the line of the walls and of the towers. The balconies were constructed of wood, the faces of which were reinforced by shields from behind which the defenders could overlook any besiegers and throw down spears and rocks, as well as launch arrows. The walls were about 15m (50ft) thick, which, coupled with the limited time available in the campaigning season, influenced the Assyrians' decision to use a siege ramp rather than a battering ram to break into the city.

The interior of the city was quite heavily populated, with many smaller buildings for the native population and a strong and a very large palace-fort – similar to an Assyrian *ekal masharti* – that had been rebuilt following what was thought to have been major earthquake damage in the earlier Level IV site.

When Sennacherib and his army arrived at Lachish in the second half of 701 BC, the forces assigned to the programme of destruction in the kingdom and the investment of Jerusalem had already been dispatched to begin their respective tasks. The Assyrian king and those of his forces earmarked to carry out the siege of Lachish established their camp relatively close to the fortress city but outside arrow range. The site chosen was large, as it was needed to house the Assyrian forces besieging the city as well as accommodate the large tents of Sennacherib and his magnates. A stylized depiction of the camp is to be found on the Lachish relief showing the king sitting on his throne. The manner in which the king is depicted with the camp to his rear points to it being located to the immediate south-west of the section of the wall which had been earmarked to build the ramp. This correlates to a hillock whose highest point is at present occupied by the modern Israeli village of Moshav Lachish. It is thought that the main settlement of the village lies directly above where the Assyrian camp was sited, so archaeologists have been unable to dig there. The Assyrian monarch would have had a daily grandstand view, not only of the progress of the building of the siege ramp, but also of the very extensive combat that took place between the assaulting Assyrian troops and the defenders in the vicinity of the city gate.

The Building of the Siege Ramp

By 701 BC, Assyrian field engineers were very experienced in the task of assessing where to build a siege ramp against the walls of an enemy city when that was deemed to be the most appropriate method to gain access. In general, the weakest section of a fortified city was always around the main gate. This was normally constructed in a position that gave relatively easy but secure access to the city, albeit not by so much that it reduced the effectiveness of the defensive wall. The builders understood this, and this is why such great efforts were made to create complex features within the main gate structure to make it extremely difficult for any besieger to effect an entry there. This was a universal feature of all walled cities in the Ancient Near East, and such certainly lay behind the design and construction of the inner and outer gate complex of Lachish.

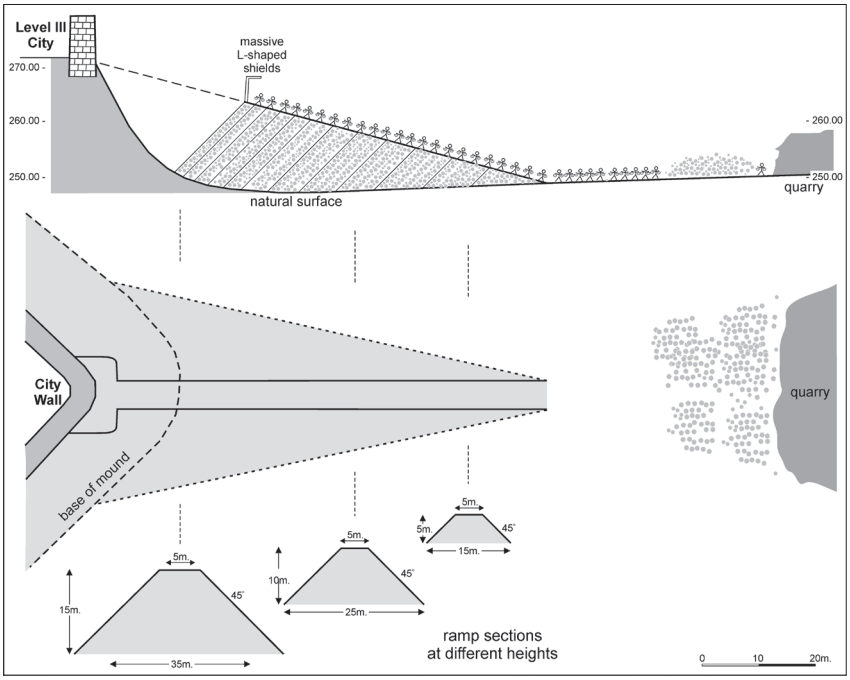
The archaeological excavations conducted under Ussishkin at Lachish revealed the design of the city gate as it existed in 701 BC. It was located in the south-western section of the city wall and was constructed in two parts. The outer gate was built to project from the line of the slope and faced to the south, onto the roadway that led into the city and parallel to the contours of the city mound. The wall surrounding this space, which was much larger than that of the inner gate, was labelled by the British archaeological team

excavating the site in the 1930s as 'the Bastion'. The floor of this section had been made flat, with the walls enclosing the space forming a major part of the massive outer foundation walls. The entrance to the 'Bastion' was flanked by two towers, between which was hung the two sections of the city gate. There was no inner secondary gate.

The inner entrance faced to the west and was much narrower than the outer gate in order to impede the progress of any attacker that had got that far. This short corridor was wide enough to permit the entry of perhaps two or possibly three persons abreast in times of peace, and, as Lachish was a chariot city, the width of the corridor had to be great enough to permit the passage of a fully manned chariot. Inset into the walls of this inner gateway were six recesses – three to each side – within which defending troops could possibly be stationed to assail the flank of any enemy soldiers that had succeeded in breaking through from the bastion.

The Assyrian engineers selected a position just to the south of the city gate complex as the site for the siege ramp. This was because the south-west corner of the wall had an elevation of just 27m (90ft) which allowed it to be joined to a nearby hillock. The construction of the siege ramp and the materials employed in its building has been the focus of the latest excavation at the site of Lachish, and the results obtained from the analysis of the various aspects of this have revealed some remarkable statistics which are used here. Although the team engaged in the initial excavation of Lachish in the 1930s excavated part of the rampart they did not recognize it as the siege ramp; it was only identified as such by the team led by the Israeli archaeologist Yigal Yadin in 1973.

According to Garfinkel et al., the construction of the ramp was started at a distance of some 80m (250ft) from the city wall itself. The source of the material used in its construction was once thought to be stones retrieved from the surrounding district, but given the priority attached to the speed of its construction, a primary source of material nearer to the actual construction site of the ramp was presumed. Indeed, Garfinkel and his colleagues identified an exposed cliff of local bedrock in close proximity to the end of ramp itself. This is now thought to be the source of the up to three million small boulders, weighing up to about 6.5kg (14lb) each, that were used in its construction. Each of these was harvested from the rock face by pick-wielding Assyrian troops, the size and shape being refined *in situ* before they were moved to the ramp. A large labour force, running into the hundreds at any one time, would have been required to manhandle these stones, probably in wicker baskets, with an estimate of 160,000 being shifted each day. It has been estimated that this number of stones would have needed at least four human labour chains, each composed of hundreds


Level III City
massive L-shaped shields
270.00 -
260.00 -
250.00 -
- 260.00
- 250.00
quarry
natural surface
City Wall
base of mound
quarry
5m.
45˚
15m.
10m.
25m.
35m.
ramp sections at different heights
0
10
20m.

OPPOSITE TOP

A diagram which serves to illustrate how the Assyrian siege ramp was built at Lachish. The profile and plan view clearly show the design and cross sections, and how care was taken in its construction. It is clear how close the site of the quarry from which the stones to build the ramp were obtained is to the actual construction site.
(Prof. Yosef Garfinkel)

OPPOSITE BOTTOM

In this image, a section through the remains of the siege ramp illustrates the myriad stones employed in its construction.
(Prof. Yosef Garfinkel)

of individuals over a period of 24 hours, with each shift of the four chains working for 12 hours each (see p. 270).

Where did their numerous teams of labourers come from? The Assyrians would have had no qualms impressing the locals and prisoners of war – these coming from those captured by their forces moving inland and sent back to Lachish to join the labour gangs. But it would seem they may also have made use of another source. In his 'Letter to the god Ashur' about his Judaean campaign, Sennacherib speaks of using 'the auxiliaries of all Amurru to carry up earth masses'. This refers to forces supplied by vassal states from the northern Levant at the beginning of the 701 BC campaign for use as auxiliary military forces who were then turned into temporary labourers and employed in the siege of Azekah. It is not unreasonable to suppose that some were also employed in this capacity at Lachish.

Once the building of the ramp had started, speed was of the essence. In the same way that the Assyrian forces operating in the Shephelah moved with great speed and efficiency when going about their systematic demolition of Judaean settlements, efficiency was also the order of the day at Lachish. It may have taken just 25 days for the ramp – which by then would be taking on the shape of a giant wedge – to have reached the city walls. That the Assyrians were known to be extremely efficient when conducting military operations was recognized by the prophet Isaiah, Ch 5 vs 27 when he observed of their modus operandi: 'None of them tired, none of them stumbling, none of them asleep or drowsy, none of them left with belt unfastened, none of them with a broken sandal strap'.

As the ramp grew larger and drew nearer to the wall it would have come into projectile range, with the labourers working on it being targeted by the defenders. The ramp builders would have deployed their own defences, and

it has been suggested that Assyrian soldiers engaged in protecting the builders would have deployed an L-shaped, extra-large version of a shield known as a *pavois*. Made of woven reeds and bound with strips of leather were much enlarged versions of the same type of shield seen being used in sieges for protection by Assyrian soldiers in the reliefs of both Tiglath-pileser and Sargon II. These would have been held up by Assyrian troops in front of the labourers bringing up the stones to extend the ramp. From the side they were higher than a man, with the L-shaped section providing protection to the fore and also overhead. Handles in the centre of the rear of the *pavois*

OPPOSITE

The nearer the ramp moved to the wall of Lachish, the more the labourers came under attack from the defenders. To suppress this, archers – those seen here come from one of the Lachish reliefs – poured massed volumes of fire onto the parapets to prevent the defenders from delaying its construction. Of note is the young eunuch warrior. Each archer is shielded by another soldier employing a large wicker *pavois*-type shield that extends to just above head height. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

enabled them to be operated and moved forward. More would have had to have been deployed, edge to edge, as the ramp moved forwards and upward.

As the ramp moved forward, the defenders on the city walls would have released volumes of arrows, stones and other impedimenta all designed to injure or kill the labourers hauling the stones. The Assyrians would have replied with their own extremely heavy showers of arrows and sling shot, as is illustrated on the Lachish reliefs. What we see are the serried ranks of the armoured archers with the armoured slingers behind them, unleashing heavy fire against the defenders on top of the walls to both incapacitate the defenders and reduce their fire.

The Assyrian troops were also attacking the defences above and about the city gate and the walls around the bastion in order to draw off Judaean troops from the parapet on the wall facing the ramp. The defenders responded in kind, even to the extent of a flaming chariot being thrown down on the Assyrians below. No doubt this was the fate of more than a few of these vehicles at Lachish.

Even as the ramp was nearing the top of the city wall, preparations were already under way to assemble the siege engines that were to be deployed once the ramp had been raised to the optimum height. It is most likely that these were assembled from prefabricated parts brought by the Assyrians as part of their logistics tail. However, the battering rams might well have used local trees cut down and adapted to take an iron 'head', with these being constructed on site within the camp by blacksmiths serving with the army. Once assembled, these rams were encased within protective structures and would have been quite heavy, estimates suggesting up to one tonne, and these would then need manpower to push them up the ramp to the top of the wall where they would go into action.

Before that could be done, however, the ramp had to be prepared to take their weight. Although the assembly of many hundreds of thousands of stones – one on top of the other – would no doubt provide a high degree of stability for the ramp structure itself, once multiple siege engines were positioned on it,

OPPOSITE

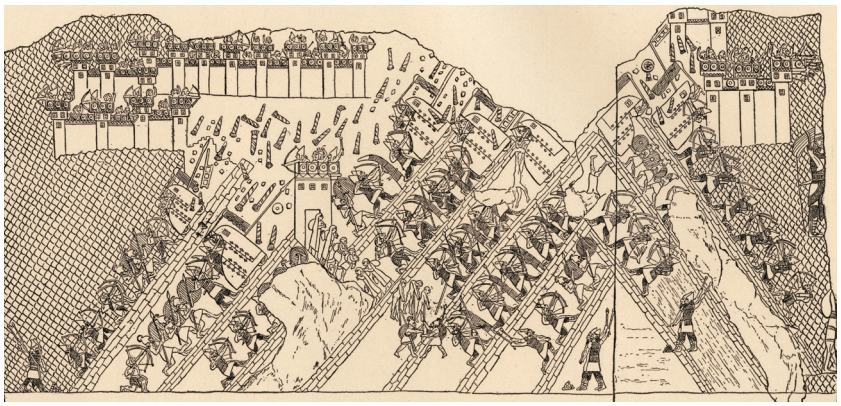
The slingers at Lachish operated in ranks behind those of the archers and are dressed in the same fashion. Only their weapon – the sling – is different. They too provided suppressing fire directed at the parapets of the fortress. (Photo by CM Dixon/Print Collector/Getty Images)

instabilities could be generated. To that end, the Assyrians laid down a layer of hard mortar over the top layer of stones, about a metre (3ft) thick, to obviate that possibility. The material has been identified as a lime plaster manufactured by the Assyrians on site. According to Ussishkin, 'copious amounts' of this material was employed in the construction of the mantle of the ramp. The final stage of preparation prior to deploying the siege engines was to lay wooden beams on top of the stones to enable them to be positioned.

The Assault

In the estimation of Garfinkel et al., it is assumed that it took about 25 days for the siege ramp to be created and completed, and a few days afterwards the Assyrian troops began the assault. So about a month after their arrival the siege engines were deployed on the top of the siege mound and began the assault on the upper rampart of the wall. The heavy battering rams, suspended by a chain within each machine, were swung by soldiers inside to demolish the upper part of the city wall, and in particular the wooden structures from which the Jewish defenders were raining down whatever came to hand to try and deny the Assyrians. Burning oil was thrown down onto the siege engines in the desperate hope they could be burned out, but it would seem they were probably covered with leather protective sheets and, in any case, at least one of the soldiers of the crew of the engine was allocated the task of using a long ladle to slop water onto wherever any oil had caught alight, the water being kept in a large container within the siege engine. No doubt archers were also moving up behind the siege engines and aiming at those Jewish defenders they could see.

We must assume that when it was deemed right, other Assyrian assault troops advanced up the siege ramp, being covered by shields carried by other soldiers, all the while under a ferocious barrage of arrows and sling shots from the archers and slingers behind them. Some of the soldiers would no doubt be carrying short assault ladders which would have reached from the top of the ramp to over the by now destroyed parapets and from which the assault troops would have gone over the top and dropped into Lachish. We do not know how long it took the Assyrians to take the city, but no doubt the fighting was intense



ABOVE

One of the major scenes from the Lachish reliefs shows the siege engines and serried ranks of archers and slingers assailing the city walls. The relief conveys the passage of events over a short time. At the same time as there is the attack on the city gate, prisoners are seen leaving by it. As the definition of the detail has declined over 2,700 years, I have employed a drawing of the same scene to allow the detail of the event to be more clearly seen. (Top: © The Trustees of the British Museum; Bottom: Photo by Culture Club/Getty Images)

TOP

A detailed image of a singular sling stone. It measures about 6 inches across. Being hit by such a projectile would likely be fatal. (Israel Antiquities Authority)

ABOVE

A very large number of arrowheads and slingstones were recovered both inside and outside the walls of Lachish during the many excavations there. The iron arrowheads have substantially corroded. The sling stones were rounded to make them more useable. They are of a substantial size and would have caused grievous wounds or death to those defenders that they struck.
(Israel Antiquities Authority)

LEFT

A colour image of one of the slingers. Both archers and slingers were dressed and equipped in the exactly the same fashion save for their weapons. Archers and slingers were of the *kisir sharruti*. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)

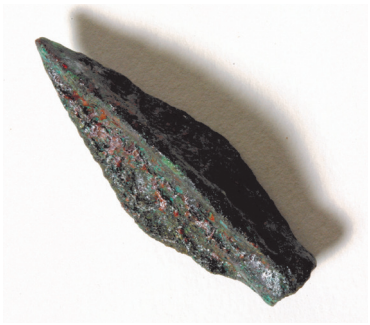
and quite ferocious. Some of the visual tropes such as the impalement of a number of Judaean prisoners outside the walls may well have happened before the final assault, using those seized inland and then sent back to the camp, or after the fall of Lachish, using prisoners taken as the assault troops moved systematically through the city. It is very likely that one of the prime targets for those assault troops that went over the wall was an attack against the rear of the defenders fighting in the gate complex. It must be assumed that once this was taken by the Assyrians and the outer gate was opened, they would have poured through it and into the city itself.

What followed was standard practice for the Assyrians. The dwellings in the city would have been swept clear of defenders, and booty assembled and then transported through the city gate. High-ranking official prisoners are seen being escorted out of the city to be executed – at least two can be seen in the reliefs being flayed, and others being beheaded with the short swords/long knives Assyrian soldiers carried. Yet more are seen on their knees in close proximity to Sennacherib on his throne begging for mercy.

The king is seen seated, holding two arrows in his left hand and a bow in his right, while possibly before him stand a number of magnates and senior officers. It is very likely that one of them is the *turtanu.* On the particular slab with this scene, Sennacherib's image has been defaced,

OPPOSITE

A section of one of the Lachish reliefs shows survivors from the city carrying a few belongings and using a cart as they leave the city escorted by troops to begin the long trek to wherever it had been determined the very large numbers of Judaeans were to be deported. The Assyrian records state that number was in excess of 200,000 people. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)



ABOVE

Although this bronze arrowhead was recovered from the Ziyaret Tepe site, it is employed here to illustrate the variety of types of arrowhead recovered at the site of Lachish. Attackers and defenders used mainly iron but also bronze arrowheads. Others were of bone – made by the defenders when they had run out of metals for casting more arrowheads. (Israel Antiquities Authority)

possibly by some vengeful Babylonian or Median soldier in 612 BC when the 'Palace without Rival' in Nineveh was burnt down. Above where Sennacherib is seated on his throne is a box with cuneiform writing within, stating: 'Sennacherib, king of all, king of Assyria sitting on his *nimedu*-throne while the spoil from the city of Lachish passed before him'.

No doubt the central palace-fortress took a little while to fall, it being the place of the final stand of the hierarchy in the city, but fall it did. The survivors of the population were rounded up and are seen in a section of a relief clearly being led away as deportees. The extensive deposits of ashes and burnt wood, fire blackened bricks and stones point to the whole of Lachish being put to the torch – again, a standard Assyrian practice.

One of the more dramatic discoveries made by the Starkey team in the 1930s was the manner in which a number of early Caananite rock tombs had been reused by the Assyrians as a mass grave. Within them was a large number of disarticulated human bones which it was estimated came from some 1,500 individuals who had been dumped there, with at least two of the heaps of the remains piled to a height of one metre (3ft) above the level of the floor. Such was the fate of many of the inhabitants of Lachish after the battle.

That Sennacherib was immensely proud of this particular martial achievement is testified by the time and labour expended on creating the series of reliefs addressing the events of the siege, and the taking of Lachish in such a short time was a measure of how effective the Assyrian Army was in undertaking such operations.

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